

**“THE STURDY GOOD OLD STOCK”:  
ENGLISHNESS, CLASS AND GENDER IN MID-  
VICTORIAN ENGLAND**

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## ABSTRACT

The dominant construction of Englishness in the mid-nineteenth century simultaneously manufactured and reinforced middle class, masculine social power. This ideology was not stable and all-encompassing, but open to resistance and renegotiation. My thesis examines the ways in which the novels of two middle class women—whose social position located them both outside the dominant discourse and ambivalently within it—reveal resistance to and complicity with the dominant social power. The construction of Englishness in the first novel, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, almost always promotes middle class social power, yet it radically rearticulates the gender roles within that discourse. Brontë is aware, however, that this conception of female Englishness is only possible outside England. Her feminist vision is also moderated by her inability completely to resist the ideology of separate spheres. Englishness in *Under Two Flags*, the second novel examined in this thesis, is even more complex. On one hand, it follows a middle class, masculine trajectory whereby the novel's protagonist must leave the corrupt and effeminate aristocratic world in order to assume an English identity. On the other hand, Ouida's enthusiasm for the aristocracy leads her at the same time to imagine an Englishness that advances aristocratic social power. The qualities that construct Cecil's middle class Englishness are thus also used to signify his nobility. Ultimately, nobility and middle class Englishness cannot satisfactorily be reconciled, and nobility in the text becomes a source for resistance to not just middle class, but masculine social power. Ouida's female characters provide further evidence of the tension between the desire to resist and reinforce the dominant gender ideology. Cigarette, overtly transgressive, is both criticised and praised. The novel pretends to position the Princess Venetia as the proper English alternative, but this is undermined elsewhere in the text.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. ENGLISHNESS AND SOCIAL POWER

“It thrills the heart to feel / A man’s a bit of English stuff” (30-1) declares Martin Farquhar Tupper in the popular mid-Victorian poem ‘England’s Heart,’ from which the title of this thesis is taken. Tupper draws upon a tradition of jingoistic, chauvinistic patriotic literature from the nineteenth century that, faintly embarrassing as it may now seem, took its source from genuine feelings of national identity and pride. For many sectors of the English population, a sense of Englishness was, as indeed it has always been, a vital part of self and belonging. Yet as Tupper’s conception of England’s ‘heart’—a bluff, sturdy Englishman—betrays, there is a selective quality to discourse of Englishness that, as I will show, favours middle class men. It is the gap where those outside the dominant discourse reside—namely women, the working classes and, more ambivalently, the aristocracy—in which I locate the starting point of my thesis, with the ultimate aim of facilitating a better understanding of the dynamics of mid-Victorian social power.

To borrow Judy Giles’s and Tim Middleton’s efficient definition, Englishness is “a nexus of values, beliefs and attitudes which are offered as unique to England and to those who identify as, or wish to identify as, English” (5). Although there is a substantial body of scholarly work on the Englishness of location,<sup>1</sup> my focus will be on those aspects that pertain to the people who identify as English, according to themselves.<sup>2</sup> This last distinction is pertinent, because, while Englishness may derive much of its potency from

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<sup>1</sup> See especially David Matless’s *Landscape and Englishness* and Ian Baucom’s *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity*. Also useful are Chapter 1 of David Gervais’s *Literary Englands: Versions of ‘Englishness’ in Modern Writing*; Anne Janowitz’s *England’s Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape*; Elizabeth K. Helsinger’s *Rural Scenes and National Representation: Britain, 1815-1850*; and Margaret Drabble’s *A Writer’s Britain: Landscape in Literature*.

<sup>2</sup> Antony Easthope’s account of Englishness as an unconscious discursive structure that “can speak for us even when we may think we are speaking for ourselves” (5) is a fascinating expansion of current ideas about English national identity, but it is beyond the boundaries of my discussion. I am only interested in those qualities that can consciously be identified as ‘English’ and hence manipulated to serve the ends of social power.

an appearance of naturalness, that is of course misleading. My perspective is drawn from the social construction theory of Peter Jackson and Jan Penrose, which “rejects the longstanding view that some categories are ‘natural,’ bearing no trace of human intervention” (2). Most significantly for my thesis, the construction of Englishness is shaped by ideology, including the desire, conscious or unconscious, to manufacture and maintain social power. As Jackson and Penrose point out, however, the use of social construction theory requires two cautions. First, “construction” does not equate to “artificiality” or “falseness”; to assume this is to “imply that a ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ alternative to the ‘artificial’ construction is possible,” which is, of course, “precisely what the social construction perspective is designed to overcome” (Jackson and Penrose 3). It is also erroneous to imagine that “if constructions are ‘artificial’ they lack ‘reality’ or do not ‘exist’” (Jackson and Penrose 3). In Jackson’s and Penrose’s words, “constructionists must take care to distinguish between their acceptance of the assertion that people operate *as if* categories ‘exist’ and their rejection of the idea that this existence is grounded in ‘reality’ as an immutable, unalterable truth” (3).

Of course, certain elements of popular discourse of nineteenth century Englishness *are* fantasy. The widely felt conviction of national supremacy obviously falls into this category. Of greater significance for this discussion is the fact that, while the very word ‘Englishness’ implicitly claims to speak for all who are English, its application to the general population was, as it is now, rather more limited. Women’s participation in English national identity was especially haunted by a sense of exclusion, a condition that was aptly illustrated by the popular Victorian preacher George Dawson when, in a series of lectures on great figures in English history, he included only one woman, Queen Elizabeth, “who he argued was like a man” (Catherine Hall 221). Anne McClintock details how this exclusion continues to mark the work of twentieth century theorists of nation like Ernst Gellner and Etienne Balibar; even Frantz Fanon, who “at other moments knew better” (353), writes, “The look that the native turns on the settler town is a look of lust ... to sit at the settler’s table, to sleep in the settler’s bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man” (cited in McClintock 343-4). Marxist theorists

have also sensed working class exclusion from national identity, a perception that is encapsulated by the claim in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* that “[t]he working men [sic] have no country” (84). While, as Antony Easthope points out, the Marxist idea that nationalism is “a hegemonic deception perpetrated by the ruling class in order to mask its own power” (6) is deficient because it denies that nationalism, and therefore a sense of national identity, is shared by anyone, the general sense of exclusion expressed by these scholars should not be dismissed. Plainly, in order properly to apprehend the role of discourse of Englishness in the manufacture of social power, it is necessary, as Jennifer DeVere Brody notes, to abandon the idea “reproduced in hegemonic discourse” of “identities as ossified categories” and instead view class, gender and nationality as “imbricated and intersubjective” (9). These are not “‘conflicting’ categories” (9) but “mutually constitutive as well as always already divided and divisive terms” (10). One cannot be discussed in isolation from the others.

Philip Dodd notes that the “reconstitution” of “Englishness and the national culture ... *in order* to incorporate and neuter various social groups ... who threatened the dominant social order” is not “a simple matter of the imposition of an identity by the dominant on the subordinate” (2, emphasis in original). Rather,

the remaking of class, gender and national identity was undertaken at such a variety of social locations and by such various groups that it is difficult to talk of a common intention .... What these groups shar[e] [is] not necessarily a common intention, but (often) an interlocking membership and an overlapping vocabulary of evaluation. (2)

Furthermore, as Dodd realises, “the establishment of hegemony involves negotiation and ‘active consent’” (2). In the words of Antonio Gramsci, from whom this argument is derived, hegemony entails “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the fundamental ruling class, a consent which comes into existence ‘historically’ from the ‘prestige’ (and hence from

the trust) accruing to the ruling class from its position and function in the world of production” (124). Nelson Mandela’s invitation in 1994 to “[m]y fellow South Africans” to see themselves, despite their “differences,” as “one people with a common destiny in our rich variety of culture, race and tradition” (cited in Easthope 7), for example, inspired one woman to write a letter to the Natal *Sunday Tribune* in which she described identifying with a nation for the first time:

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to President Nelson Mandela for a gift I didn’t even know I wanted, until May 10, 1994.

As part of probably one of the smallest minorities in this vast country (I am a white, suburban, thirty-something mother) I have never understood, let alone had any feelings of, nationalism and patriotism. I have never known what it is to identify with and feel part of a larger whole.

For the first time in my life I am moved when I hear our anthem being played, or see that multicoloured horizontal Y fluttering in the breeze. I have been moved to tears more often this week than in my entire life; and those tears have been of profound joy at finally having a country to claim as my own. (Cited in Easthope 7-8)

It is easy to see how the interests of the ruling class are subsequently built into the dominant discourse. Crucially, though, Gramsci also sees the possibility of resistance to the dominant discourse in “moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent diminishes” (124). The idea of Englishness as an historical process that is contested and continually re-forged is central to this thesis.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the widely accepted logic of Brody’s assertions in recent years, analyses of the relationship between class and gender in discussions of mid-Victorian Englishness, if

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, although they cannot be considered within the confines of this discussion, one should not, as Dodd points out, exclude the possibility of “completely oppositional identities and practices forged by the subordinated groups” (3) that are not formed as a consequence of resistance and as such on the terms of the ruling group.

they exist at all, are largely partial. Paul Langford's recent book *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character 1650-1850* skims over the question of class in three sentences in the introduction, while the problem of women's integration into discourse of Englishness occasions only brief discussions in the sections headed 'Liberty' and 'Domesticity.' Conversely, in his 1990 examination of Englishness in English poetry from Dryden to Robert Browning, John Lucas is aware that "[b]eing English could typically come to mean a set of complementary but more often contradictory awarenesses, including those of class, regionalism, and perhaps gender," but he admits "that my concerns are almost exclusively with the construction of an *Englishman* and that the term *Englishwoman* will need to be investigated by feminist historians—assuming that they think it worth their while to do so" (7). Cognisance of issues of class shapes Lucas's book, but with the exception of the chapter on John Clare (whose writing predates the mid-Victorian period), he does not specifically address its role, a limitation that is compounded by his omission of issues of gender.

Stephen Haseler also ignores the question of gender, but argues that Englishness was founded on "a pre-industrial trinity of 'land,' 'class' and 'race'" (17). He contends that "[d]uring its formation" in the eighteenth century, "the peoples of the islands were no part of the idea of Englishness .... Rather, Englishness was the property, and reflection, of the caste that solidified its hold on the country at the time when England ... was about to take off as the world's leading power" (17). Consequently, the

eighteenth-century landed elite ... fuse[d] land and class in a manner which would create the peculiar character of the English class system—and become such a pronounced part of the cult of Englishness—for the next two hundred years. Englishness ... became virtually synonymous with a culture of class distinction. (18-19)

While I do not dispute Haseler's account of Englishness so far as the eighteenth century is concerned, his contention that this model survived intact throughout the nineteenth



century “hardly touched” (17) by industrialisation is mistaken. As I will show, the dominant conception of Englishness in the mid-nineteenth century was shaped by not the landed elite, but the middle classes, and, even though it was influenced by an ambiguous middle class desire to emulate the aristocracy, it directly reflected capitalist ideals.

Feminist accounts of Englishness, which are central to this thesis, tend to be more sensitive to the relationship between gender, nationality and class. Following the publication of Mary Poovey’s *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, scholars such as Elizabeth Langland and Anita Levy have expanded on her conception of the relationship between middle class domestic culture and nationality. Stephanie L. Barczewski’s account of female domesticity and English national identity in *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood*, however, fails to take into account the middle class dimension of this ideology; rather, she describes what “[t]he Victorians believed” (179) and “the Victorian feminine ideal” (181) as though they were politically neutral and universally shared, a deficiency that characterises her book as a whole. Postcolonial feminist theorists such as Susan Meyer, Sara Mills, Jenny Sharpe and McClintock are also aware of the importance of domestic ideology to Victorian Englishness, even if Englishness itself is not their focus. Consciousness of the centrality of class varies amongst these scholars, but McClintock in particular is attentive to such matters.

One aspect of mid-Victorian Englishness that has, a little unavoidably, been discussed in relation to gender is the overtly physical masculine Englishness endorsed by individuals like Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes. Some accounts, such as those by Norman Vance and Graham Dawson, consider Englishness and masculinity but are not particularly attentive to class. Dennis W. Allen’s examination of how, “[i]f the boys at Rugby constitute the corporate body of ‘Young England,’ this body is also a class body, the body of the bourgeoisie” (119), though, echoes a newer tone. In the same volume, Donald E. Hall explores how “the central agenda of the Christian Socialist movement,” which “remain[ed] a telling component of muscular Christianity,” was to “cal[m] and

educat[e] the lower classes with the promise of rendering them ‘fit’ for freedom” (47). C. J. W.-L. Wee is also aware of class in his useful essay about how “Charles Kingsley helped create a masculinist image of an imperial English nation” (66). Although they influence my thesis, what these scholars have not examined is the implication of this masculine Englishness for female national identity.

Plainly, mid-Victorian discourse of Englishness was imbued with ideology of class and gender. The dominant discourse was, I intend to show in this thesis, structured around the promotion of middle class, masculine social power. It was not, however, a uniform, coherent ideology, but continually subject to renegotiation and resistance. Positioned outside the dominant discourse, yet ambivalently within it, middle class women were uniquely placed both to reinforce and renegotiate the conception of national identity offered to them by that discourse. To this end, I will focus on the construction of Englishness in two mid-Victorian novels by middle class women, Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853) and Ouida’s *Under Two Flags: A Tale of the Household and the Desert* (1867), with the aim of facilitating a better understanding of the ways in which social power is produced and resisted.

## 2. ENGLISHNESS AND BRITISHNESS

Eric Evans claims that from the period 1790 to 1870

The quest for a distinctively *English*, as opposed to a *British*, identity ... is, in fact, one that will prove fruitless. ‘British’ is the dominant descriptor of patriotic identification; and at any level more local than that of ‘Britain,’ the English were more likely to identify with their own regions and localities than with the whole country of England *per se*. (232)

It is difficult to understand how Evans arrived at this conclusion, because, as the following chapters will show, the nineteenth century was a period of enormous debate

about just what it meant to be English. Evans's use of Patrick Joyce's *Visions of the People* to justify his claims is particularly flawed. Putting aside the fact that Joyce focuses on the working classes, who would have been more likely to construct alternative nationalities than the middle classes who dominated the construction of discourse of Englishness in the nineteenth century, he does not argue that regional identity was performed at the expense of a wider national identity. On the contrary, he contends that Lancashire, the county he examines in his discussion, was imagined to "stan[d] for the true England" (293). Evans does, however, locate a potential confusion inherent in mid-Victorian ideas of Britishness and Englishness. Rather than assert that identification with a British identity was at the expense of an English identity, though, it is much more plausible to interpret Englishness as tending to subsume a specifically British identity.

Linda Colley argues that intermarriage between the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish gentry in the eighteenth century resulted in a new "*British* landed establishment" (157, my emphasis) but, as Haseler points out, "although this newly forged ethnic mix of a class was real enough ... it hardly matters. For the fact was that the English dominated this class, with most of the arriviste Celts being more than willing to become 'honorary Englishmen'" (18). During the eighteenth century

England—and Englishness—was expanding to cover more and more of its adjacent territory. By the end of the eighteenth century not only had a new, and enlarged, nation-state—of *Great Britain*—taken hold on the islands, but the ideology of Englishness held sway within it. And through the agency of this new state ... the English idea would be transmitted to the world. (Haseler 28)

A form of "Britishness" that had its origins in the Celtic Ancient Britons maintained "a peripheral existence" in "the outlying areas of the islands, mainly through Celtic tongues" (Haseler 28). For the most part, though, the idea of Britain was appropriated by the English. Thus while "[t]he Empire was a decidedly *British* affair"—as Haseler notes, "Scottish involvement in commercial, entrepreneurial, trading and financial origins of the

empire, as well as in its building and running, was immense”—“it was the English ... who were to become nature’s imperialists” (37). Barczewski also usefully identifies how histories of Britain in the nineteenth century were

so Anglocentric that they barely acknowledged the existence of the other parts of the British Isles, and they were completely devoid of any awareness that Scotland, Wales, and Ireland had separate identities and separate pasts. The story they told was one of a triumphal English expansion, an inexorable process of domination and absorption with a civilizing mission at its heart. Without England, so went the standard argument, the remainder of the British Isles would have been doomed to a marginal existence as provincial backwaters; with it, they were blessed to be parts—albeit subordinate ones—of the greatest nation on the face of the earth. (49)

For this reason, the apparent elision of Englishness and Britishness at certain moments in the course of my argument should not be viewed as problematic.

### 3. OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

As mentioned, this thesis uses Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* and Ouida’s *Under Two Flags* as the focus for an examination of the dynamics of social power in constructions of mid-Victorian Englishness. Chapter 1 outlines some of the ways in which the dominant ideology of Englishness in the mid-nineteenth century, as it pertains to the novels in question, was manufactured in the service of middle class, masculine social power. I will argue that this discourse was structured around the performance of middle class domestic ideology on a national scale. Englishness thus emerges as a middle class, masculine quality that relegates women to a symbolic role and marginalises the working classes as it simultaneously reinforces middle class power. It is complicated further by the middle class desire simultaneously to identify with and define themselves against the aristocracy.

Novels with foreign settings, which facilitate a greater consciousness of national identity, were a practical choice for this project. Chapter 2 addresses Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, which is set in a fictional Belgium. As I will show, *Villette* both betrays the pervasive nature of the dominant discourse and offers possibilities for the renegotiation of social power. For the most part, Brontë's construction of Englishness is confined to the characteristics promoted by the dominant middle class, masculine discourse. On one level, this discourse facilitates the conscious or unconscious promotion of middle class social power that permeates the novel. At the same time, however, Brontë renegotiates the gender roles within that discourse, imagining a national identity that simultaneously authorises female social power. Brontë's feminist vision is nonetheless moderated by her inability completely to discard the dominant gender ideology, and her ultimate vision for the possibility of the actualisation of female social power has a somewhat pessimistic edge.

Ouida's desert romance *Under Two Flags* is the focus of Chapter 3. While Ouida is now less known than Brontë (although she was one of the most successful writers in the nineteenth century), *Under Two Flags* is a productive companion to *Villette*. Very different form, content and intention shape the two novels. Where *Villette* is realist, the trajectory of its heroine's adventures for the most part restricted to the confines of middle class identity, Ouida's fantasy of an English aristocrat exiled to life in the French army in Algeria is deliberately romantic and sensational. In addition to her aristocratic sympathies, Ouida's open celebration of masculinity contrasts with Brontë's more overtly feminist text. Within this framework, *Under Two Flags* both offers different possibilities for the articulation of social power and testifies to the same ideologies and tensions that shape Brontë's writing. Thus by setting *Under Two Flags* not in Europe, but Africa, Ouida amplifies the opportunities for renegotiation of middle class, masculine social power offered by the foreign setting. Likewise, her attempts to promote aristocratic social power present her with additional opportunity to resist middle class gender ideology, yet at the same time the novel betrays the adherence to middle class social power that is so apparent in *Villette*. The class dynamics in *Under Two Flags* also usefully reflect the way

in which middle class attempts to construct an identity in the mid-nineteenth century were complicated by the ambivalent desire to identify with the aristocracy. Together with *Villette*, then, *Under Two Flags* offers valuable insight into the production of social power embedded within the construction of Englishness in mid-Victorian England, both revealing possibilities for resistance and testifying to the pervasive nature of the dominant ideology.

## CHAPTER 1

### 1. MIDDLE CLASS DISCOURSE OF GENDER AND MASCULINE SOCIAL POWER

The dominant conception of Englishness in the mid-nineteenth century simultaneously promoted the interests of middle class men. The foundation for this lay in middle class gender ideology—the source, as I will show, of Brontë’s and Ouida’s resistance to and complicity with the dominant ideology in their constructions of Englishness. Before attending to discourse of Englishness itself, therefore, I will first delineate the ways in which the dominant middle class gender ideology produced and reinforced social power.

It is now widely understood that the ideology of separate spheres, for all that it was believed to be based on natural, biologically determined differences, was fundamentally implicated in the promotion of middle class, masculine social, economic and political power. Men’s role was oriented around labour outside the home, manufacturing the empire and attaining financial ‘independence,’ or a wage sufficient to maintain his family, achieved through honest work. As Sonja O. Rose says, “[i]n the last half of the nineteenth century, the size of his wage packet linked a man’s status at home and in the community with his masculinity” (130).<sup>1</sup> Connecting masculinity with capitalist success obviously enabled the middle classes to assert superiority over the working classes,<sup>2</sup> while rendering work an important part of the ideology positioned them against the “Idle” or “Unworking Aristocracy” (180), in Thomas Carlyle’s words, whose wealth was not obtained by honest labour.

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<sup>1</sup> As early as 1838, as Catherine Hall describes, the inhabitants of Birmingham

celebrated the day when slaves became men. For slaves by definition could not be men, since a man who did not own himself in his own property could not be a man. Manliness was synonymous with independence and once slaves had achieved the basis of that independence, they could learn to be men. (‘Greenland’s’ 217)

<sup>2</sup> The dominance of this middle class ideology was such that financial independence was, as Keith McClelland and Sonya O. Rose have discussed, as much a working class as a middle class ideal. See particularly Chapter 6, “‘Manliness, Virtue, and Self Respect’: Gender Antagonism and Working-Class Respectability’ in Rose’s *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England*.

Unsurprisingly, those qualities that were imagined to constitute masculinity fitted men for capitalist success, although it should be noted from the outset that these qualities were not necessarily consistent: as the context changed, contradictory characteristics could alternately come to signify masculinity (and, concomitantly, femininity). According to the dominant ideology, men were, as John Ruskin states in 'Of Queen's Gardens' (1864), "active, progressive, defensive" (73). They were imagined to be rational, logical and characterised by a powerful self-discipline that was not just physical, but emotional and verbal. As suggested by what Herbert Sussman calls the "continued demanding" (13) nature of their self-discipline, masculine self-restraint was believed to accompany powerful and profound emotions. Contradictorily, though, masculinity could also signify frankness or naturalness. In Robin Gilmour's words, "'Manliness' [was] a key Victorian concept" which "connote[d] a new openness and directness, a new sincerity, in social relations" (18); "a balance of masculinity, simplicity and directness of manners, and tenderness" (155).

Women, meanwhile, were situated as dependants in the home that was a visible symbol of male material success. Their role included the management of men's profits for the display of social status through activities such as home decoration and the art of etiquette.<sup>3</sup> In addition, as the guardians of domesticity women were the repositories for middle class virtue. By "uniting himself in marriage to a satisfactory exponent of femininity, a typical exponent of middle-class masculinity" could, as Patricia Ingham shows, appropriate that virtue, subsuming

her identity into his and becom[ing] possessed of her high-mindedness and purity .... As articulated by the law, the process of marrying changed husband and wife into one person, since 'the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband.' This now morally excellent man thus became well suited to the duty of restraining the irrational and dangerous working classes. (22)



Robert Gray notes how “the moral decay of the working class was seen above all in terms of its deficient patterns of family life, the apparent absence of values of domesticity, family responsibility, thrift and accumulation” (245).<sup>4</sup> Domestic ideology also established middle class superiority over what was widely considered to be the libertine aristocracy.<sup>5</sup>

As Michel Foucault argues, the management of sexuality is an important strategy in the promotion of social power. Constructing female sexual passion as aberrant, the middle classes appropriated feminine sexual purity. Concomitantly, the working classes were imagined to represent a dangerously uncontrolled sexuality, with, according to Lucy Bland, “the bourgeois lady’s (a)sexuality” contrasting “not simply” to “the prostitute, but all working-class women of the ‘residuum,’ the unrespectable poor, who like prostitutes were seen as potential health hazards ... and [believed to] represen[t] a public danger through their prolific reckless breeding” (cited in Nead 7). This connection between sexuality, immorality and the working classes is made plain in Samuel Bracebridge Hemyng’s 1861 account of prostitution:

Loose women generally throw a veil over their early life, and you seldom, if ever, meet with a woman who is not either a reduced governess or a clergyman’s daughter; not that there is a word of truth in the allegation—but it is their particular whim to say so .... To be unchaste among the lower classes is not always a subject of reproach ... the depravity of manners ... begins so very early, that they think it rather a distinction than otherwise to be unprincipled. (Cited in Ingham 24)

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Langland provides an outline of critical sources for this idea (‘Women’s Writing’ 138).

<sup>4</sup> See also the chapter titled ‘Sociology: Disorder in the House of the Poor’ in Anita Levy’s *Other Women: The Writing of Class, Race, and Gender 1832-1898* for a good discussion of the Victorian middle class belief in the immorality in the working classes and its supposed roots in lack of domestic values.

<sup>5</sup> As Keith Thomas describes, “[f]rom the seventeenth century, if not earlier, there becomes apparent a strong tendency to place a new and heightened emphasis upon the values of family life and to deplore any aristocratic or libertine conduct which would be likely to jeopardize domestic security” (204).

The sexual excess of the aristocracy, made famous by the licentiousness of past monarchs and epitomised by Samuel Richardson's *Lovelace*, was also familiar to the middle classes.

While, as I will show, Brontë and Ouida are to varying degrees constrained by middle class gender ideology, they are each aware that, as empowering as rhetoric about feminine virtue might seem, it of course offered women little real social power. By excluding them from the outside world, the doctrine of separate spheres crucially limited their economic, legal and political power. This exclusion was reinforced, as Brontë especially is aware, by the qualities that were imagined to constitute femininity.

Where men were “active” and “progressive,” women were passive, a quality that was encapsulated by the Victorian exaltation of female beauty, which implicitly constructed them as objects to be looked at. Women were believed to be intellectually weak and irrational, guided instead by a natural intuition. This meant that they had, as the Victorian medical lecturer Thomas Laycock says, “less capability than man for dealing with the abstract in philosophy, science, and art” (176). Likewise, their illogical method of achieving practical ends, as William Caldwell Roscoe claims, rendered them unsuited for commercial or political activity:

women ... do not discuss practical matters efficiently when met together; they become discursive,—set larks and run hares; each is occupied with her own ideas, and several speak together. They do the work excellently: they do not shine in the committee-room. (402)

Women were also imagined to have little self-control. John Barlow, the then Secretary to the Royal Institution, summarises the dominant perspective in an 1843 lecture ‘On Man's Power over Himself to Prevent or Control Insanity,’ in which he deems “woman” to be “left at the mercy of events, the creature of impulse and of instinct” (‘Power of Self-Control’ 245). Feminine volubility, represented by characters like Flora Finching in

Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1857), was a familiar Victorian stereotype. Little effort was made to disguise the relative value of masculine self-control. As the literary critic James Fitzjames Stephen said in 1857, "Freedom, law, established rules .... are possible only to men who will be patient, quiet, moderate, and tolerant of difference in opinion; and therefore their results are intolerable to a feminine, irritable, noisy mind" (cited in Dowling 32). Similarly, in *The Roman and the Teuton* (1864) Kingsley describes how "[a]s in individuals so in nations, unbridled indulgence of the passions must produce, and does produce, frivolity, effeminacy, slavery to the appetite of the moment, a brutalized and reckless temper, before which, prudence, energy, national feeling, any and every feeling which is not centered in self, perishes utterly" (38).

As the masculine parallel directs, if women had little self-control, their passions were at least considered to be weak or non-existent. Insofar as it was believed to be the source of their virtue, women's passionlessness might at first seem empowering.<sup>6</sup> However, it is an easy step from a conception of superficial emotion, aided by concomitant ideas about the weakness of the female intellect, to a belief in the triviality or 'lightness' of the feminine mind. Roscoe sarcastically describes women who try to ape the power that results from masculine self-discipline, "the brown passionate school" who "are reticent,—dumb almost, but mankind in intellect" with "tremendous feelings, very deep down indeed, and threatening explosion, which a preternatural self-control prevents" (414). As this directs, women's lack of self-control limited their participation in serious literature and art and scholarly enterprises, a condition that is satirised by the heroine of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856):

I read a score of books on womanhood  
To prove, if women do not think at all,

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<sup>6</sup> As Roscoe says,

Woman is higher than man in her nature; she is less noble in the degree of self-control and independent responsibility imposed upon her. To man, with instincts less pure, intuitions less deep, sensibilities less fine, and a heart less faithful and unselfish, has been given a weightier charge—to be more entirely under his own control, to be more completely master of himself. (404)

They may teach thinking ... —books that boldly assert  
 Their right of comprehending husband's talk  
 When not too deep, and even of answering  
 With pretty 'may it please you,' or 'so it is,'— (1.427-4)

When contrasted with masculine profundity, trivial or 'light' occupations like the niceties of social etiquette were, their role in the manufacture of middle class social status notwithstanding, instead considered to be consonant with the feminine character. Although, as Joan N. Burstyn points out, by 1870 women's education had come to include "the development of a woman's intellect as far as her femininity would allow" (40), it still had a strong focus, particularly in fashionable schools, on the "accomplishments" (36) that were its sole focus in the early nineteenth century. (Boys, on the other hand, learned 'serious' subjects like Latin and Greek.) Concern with dress and appearance was considered to be another peculiarly 'feminine' trait; as John Harvey has detailed, men in the nineteenth century signalled their gravity with austere dress. Women's concern with appearance, both of dress and manners, is doubly significant here, because it also suggested an insincerity that was inconsonant with manly frankness.

As both novels testify, gender binaries were central to the construction of middle class identity. Compared to the middle classes, the working classes were imagined to be irrational. This view was reflected in their infantilisation in middle class discourse, as expressed by John Townsend's article 'The Suffrage' in the first edition of *Politics for the People* (1848):

I cannot claim [suffrage] for those who are unworthy and incapable of exercising it, so long as they are thus unworthy or incapable .... If I were a child or a madman, would it be loving me to trust me with a razor? (Cited in Williams 73)

The working classes were also believed to lack self-control, a quality that is particularly central to the construction of middle class identity in both novels. Richard Sennett has

shown how “[r]estraint of emotion in the theater became a way for middle-class audiences to mark the line between themselves and the working class” (206). According to Sennett, a

‘respectable’ audience by the 1850’s was an audience that could control its feelings through silence; the old spontaneity was called ‘primitive.’ The Beau Brummell ideal of restraint in bodily appearance was being matched by a new idea of respectable noiselessness in public. (206)

Self-discipline provided the middle classes with the means to elevate themselves morally above the aristocracy as well. The Earl of Mount Severn in Mrs Henry Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861), whose habits of “sober application” are lead into “dissipation” after he succeeds to the earldom, transforming him into “the most reckless among the reckless” (3) of men, is a typical example of this middle class view of the aristocracy. Appropriately, middle class self-discipline encompassed financial restraint. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall discuss how “aristocratic disdain for sordid money matters, their casual attitude to debt and addiction to gambling which had amounted to a mania in some late eighteenth-century circles, were anathema to the middling ranks whose very existence depended on the establishment of creditworthiness and avoidance of financial embarrassment” (21). As Yellowplush in Thackeray’s *The Yellowplush Papers* (1841) says, “For a man of vulgar family, [gambling is] the wust trade that can be—for a man of common feelinx of honesty, this profession is quite imposbil; but for a real throrough-bread genlmn, it’s the easiest and most prophetable line he can take” (191).

Emotional restraint and laconic habits could, contradictorily, also be associated with the aristocracy, gesturing, perhaps, towards the middle class desire to emulate them at the same time that they sought to define themselves in opposition to them. Middle class writers dealt with the contradiction in different ways. In *Little Dorrit* (1857), Charles Dickens satirises Mrs. Merdle’s aristocratic insouciance as symptomatic of hypocritical heartlessness. In my discussion on *Under Two Flags*, on the other hand, I will show how

such characteristics are depicted as symptomatic not of self-discipline but laziness and frivolous emotion.

As will later be pivotal for my chapter on *Under Two Flags*, the figure of the gentleman provides a juncture between gender ideology and the ambiguous attitude towards the aristocracy that shaped middle class identity. The idea of the gentleman, which offers an additional or overlapping conception of middle class masculinity, was appropriated by the middle classes during the nineteenth century. As Arlene Young says, it “was a key concept in the first strategic move on the part of the middle class in its rise to social and cultural dominance—the appropriation of the moral authority that had been the birthright of the aristocracy” (5). The mid-Victorian gentleman was, according to Gilmour, based upon a rejection of the “eighteenth-century attitude to manners ... epitomised by Lord Chesterfield’s *Letters to his Son* (1774).” Chesterfield’s gentleman was constructed around the belief that “manners are necessarily a system of insincerities” (Gilmour 19) and focused on the importance of appearances, “rigidi[fy]ing,” according to David Castronovo, the “graceful falsehood into a code of counterfeit actions calculated to make a man ‘shine’” (37). While the aristocracy continued to cultivate superficial social form, the mid-Victorian English gentleman, by contrast, was characterised by a plain but genuine courtesy. As a reviewer in the *Saturday Review* in 1862 put it, “The true gentleman is absolutely and unalterably the same in the cottage and in the palace, simply out of respect for himself and a noble scorn of appearing for a moment other than he is” (cited in Gilmour 21).

This quality obviously aligns with manly frankness, again revealing the extent to which gender binaries were embedded in the construction of middle class identity. Other gentlemanly characteristics confirmed middle class appropriation of masculine qualities. Self-control was, tellingly, central to the middle class idea of the gentleman.<sup>8</sup> Francis

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<sup>8</sup> Reflecting the contradictory nature of middle class masculinity, this quality obviously exists in tension with gentlemanly frankness. Volland Waters has discussed how conduct books embody a paradox in that they are designed to instruct men who are already gentlemen (which suggests that gentlemanliness is a natural state) how to be gentlemen (which suggests that gentlemanliness is a state that must be attained through sustained effort).

Lieber locates the gentleman's "fear of betraying the purest emotions" (13), while in his 1852 *The Idea of a University* John Henry Newman describes how a true gentleman "is seldom prominent in conversation, and never wearisome" (159) and in argument never "mistake[s] the point in argument [or] waste[s] [his] strength on trifles" (160). A further component of middle class identity that helped constitute middle class gentlemanly behaviour was capitalist labour. According to Ruskin, "Gentlemen have to learn that it is no part of their duty or privilege to live on other people's toil" (cited in Gilmour 7).

For all that the gender binaries that were central to the idea of the middle class gentleman constructed middle class identity in opposition to the aristocracy (and, always, the working classes), however, this trajectory competed with the desire to appropriate nobility. As numerous scholars have pointed out,<sup>9</sup> it was the very ambiguity of this figure's location between qualities of noble birth and morality that made it so powerful as a tool for social power. Claims such as that by Samuel Smiles that the "true gentleman is of no rank or class" (cited in Waters 33) notwithstanding, it was the very invocation of gentility that made it so attractive to the middle classes.<sup>10</sup> Like Dickens, who "spoke seriously of his father's 'coat of arms' ... when his father's mother was a domestic servant and the father himself was a civil servant who had been imprisoned for debt" (Castronovo 10-1), most middle class men were anxious to prove their affinity with the aristocracy. Many of the qualities that were familiarly attributed to the middle class gentleman, such as honour, were in fact directly derived from aristocratic modes of behaviour (I have already shown how self-control, for example, was ambiguously linked to the aristocracy). Thus for all that the figure of the gentleman compounded middle class utilisation of gender ideology in the construction of its identity against both upper and

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<sup>9</sup> For example see Robin Gilmour's *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*, pp. 1-9; David Castronovo's *The English Gentleman: Images and Ideals in Literature and Society*; Shirley Robin Letwin's *The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct*, 3-21; Karen Volland Waters's *The Perfect Gentleman: Masculine Control in Victorian Men's Fiction, 1870-1901*, pp. 13-24; and Philip Mason's *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal*, pp. 12, 16-7.

<sup>10</sup> As Michael Brander says:

Above all, [the Victorian age] was an age of radical change and expansion, both at home and abroad, hence, however complacent a face they might show outwardly to the world, inwardly the Victorians felt insecure. It was a sign of this insecurity that the Victorians as a whole were obsessed with gentility, for it was the ambition of all classes to attain gentlemanly behaviour. (17)

lower classes, it simultaneously reflected middle class ambivalence towards the aristocracy.

## 2. DISCOURSE OF ENGLISHNESS AND MIDDLE CLASS, MASCULINE POWER

Women's participation in Englishness was structured around the dominant domestic ideology that lay at the heart of middle class, masculine social power, a situation that, as I will discuss in the following chapters, Brontë and Ouida both protest against and are simultaneously constrained by. According to Mary Poovey, "the image of woman was critical to the image of the English national character, which helped legitimize both England's sense of moral superiority and the imperial ambitions this superiority underwrote" (9) so that "by mid-century" domesticity "had come to be equated with the very identity of an Englishman" (73). Numerous contemporary commentaries testify to the relationship between Englishness and the home. In 1857, Alexander James Beresford-Hope stated that "the distinguishing characteristics of Englishmen [are] the love of home, the purity of husband and wife, and the union of one family" (cited in Poovey 73), while a reviewer in *Fraser's Magazine* considered that Dickens "comprehends" the "national character" partly through "his enthusiastic worship of the household gods" (cited in Poovey 109). As superintendents of the home, middle class women assured England's moral superiority as they simultaneously promoted that of the middle classes. Appropriately, the control of sexuality was central. In Poovey's words:

fidelity was assumed to be the natural condition of wives and ... faithful wives were taken as the sign of England's moral superiority. Faithful wives therefore guaranteed the legitimacy of England's dynastic claims, just as they facilitated the individual man's dynastic ambition. (114)

While Englishwomen were defined by their relation to the home, men were, as Elizabeth Langland shows, "invested with all the active virtues that have formed the empire" ('Nation and Nationality' 18). As a result of this process, "England itself emerges as a



feminine Britannia, the fertile soil of her English sons' achievements, and Englishness takes on an increasingly masculine construction" (14); women are "reduced ... to wives and mothers" in a "world where 'English mothers,' as ground and material nutriment ... fortify their sons with a love 'as fair and whole as human love can be,' in order that 'a young and true heart' can achieve the full realization and expression of English values" (18). As the connection with Britannia suggests, women's role in Englishness becomes primarily symbolic; in particular, England or Britain was often represented as a vulnerable woman who must be protected.<sup>11</sup> The consequence is that 'English' characteristics read like a catalogue of middle class masculinity while foreigners were simultaneously feminised (this of course exposes the relative value of masculine and feminine traits). Meanwhile, as Pat Thane and Jane Mackay point out,

The qualities of the perfect Englishwoman were publicly discussed, but they were not generally perceived as being specifically English. Rather they were those qualities—essentially domestic and maternal—believed to be universal in Woman. The ideal Englishwoman's special quality was that she practised these virtues in a fashion superior to women of other countries. (191)<sup>12</sup>

Women, then, were denied even a distinctly English identity; a national character. As I will show, this fact is pertinent to both novels, but it especially complicates Brontë's task of constructing an English identity for her female protagonist.

As both novels show, women's exclusion from discourse of Englishness can equally be applied to the working classes and, more ambivalently, the aristocracy. The rest of this chapter, therefore, will examine the way in which the qualities that were imagined to constitute Englishness in the dominant discourse, as relevant to the novels in question,

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<sup>11</sup> For example, see Cannon Schmitt's discussion of the discourse used to describe the Indian mutiny, pp76-82.

<sup>12</sup> While Thane and Mackay are specifically discussing the period 1880-1920, in this part of the discussion they are drawing upon ideas that apply equally well to earlier in the century. Their claim that such a view was "the conventional conception of the female role," which was challenged in this period by "the emergence of feminism and ... the 'new woman'" (191), particularly suggests it applies to earlier in the nineteenth century.

manufactured and reinforced middle class, masculine social power, with particular emphasis on the way in which women, the working classes and the aristocracy were written out of that discourse. This will lay the foundation for the next two chapters, which will demonstrate how these qualities, along with those aspects of the dominant ideology that have already been discussed, are used alternately in *Villette* and *Under Two Flags* to resist and uphold the dominant social power.

Before commencing the rest of this chapter, some explanation of the Others against whom the English constructed their identity is necessary. While the assumption of a “simple connection between faith and nationality” (Claydon and McBride 12) has been shown to be problematic,<sup>13</sup> there is, as *Villette* overtly testifies, no doubt that since the sixteenth century Protestantism, and the existence of a Catholic Other, were central to English national identity. Linda Colley notes how both English law and English society in general were structured so as to exclude Catholics. Until 1829

British Catholics were not allowed to vote and were excluded from all state offices and from both houses of Parliament. For much of the eighteenth century they were subject to punitive taxation, forbidden to possess weapons and discriminated against in terms of access to education, property rights and freedom of worship. In other words, in law—if not always in fact—they were treated as potential traitors, as un-British. (Colley 19)

As John Wolffe discusses, the “remoulding of protestant ideology by the evangelical movement” meant that from the 1820s on it “began to acquire a more dogmatic and more explicitly anti-catholic temper than it had possessed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (293). Edward Irving’s “very public and popular ministry” (Wolffe 294) was particularly influential in galvanising anti-Catholicism. Anti-Catholic sentiment was encouraged by the Oxford Movement of the 1830s, which sought to reintroduce Catholic elements into the Anglican Church, and given renewed impetus first in 1845, when there

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<sup>13</sup> See Claydon and McBride, ‘The Trials of the Chosen Peoples: Recent Interpretations of Protestantism and National Identity in Britain and Ireland,’ and Stephen Pincus’s “‘To Protect English Liberties’: The

was debate about state funding of the Royal College of St Patrick in Maynooth, Country Kildare, a Catholic college that trained men for the priesthood, and again in 1850, when the Roman Church re-established its hierarchy in England, leading to fears of ‘Papal Aggression.’

All Catholic nations, including the Irish (and, in fact, all Celts, whether Catholic or not), had the potential to be positioned in opposition to the English, but the French, who function as significant English Others in both novels, require special consideration. In addition to their religious differences, they were the source of “[s]ix centuries of military and economic rivalry” (Campos 7). The consequence was that, in Gerald Newman’s words,

it would perhaps be no exaggeration to say that a consciousness of France as England’s military, commercial and diplomatic enemy was one of the foundation stones of the national mind ... and one of the very few articles of belief that in some way or another was capable of influencing all Britons beneath otherwise immense diversities of wealth, locality, dialect, occupation, religion, and political faith. (75)

To return to the primary focus of the discussion, one mid-Victorian English quality, central to both novels, that suggested middle class masculinity was self-discipline. The English were believed to be undemonstrative, the quality that Matthew Arnold invokes when he describes the English as characterised by “*steadiness*” (*Celtic* 78). Taciturnity was another familiar ‘English’ manifestation of self-control. According to Carlyle, “The English are a dumb people. They can do great acts, but not describe them” (162).

In contrast to the English, the “ever-talking, ever-gesticulating French” (163) were famous for their lack of self-restraint. In his 1856 short story ‘The Lady of Glenwith Grange,’ Wilkie Collins describes as a “perfect miracle” a Frenchman who “talk[s] little in general society; [and] utter[s] his words, when he [does] speak, with singular calmness

and deliberation” (189). The Celts were also characterised by lack of self-restraint. As L. P. Curtis says:

The charge of instability or emotional incontinence played ... an important role in the English image of the Irish Celt .... By instability English observers meant that the Irish not only lived by and off their irrational impulses but experienced rapid alternation of moods or emotions. (54)

Although, as both novels show, the English did not lightly indulge in displays of emotion, their emotions were, like those of middle class men, believed to be particularly powerful. Carlyle claims that “the heart” of “Mr. Bull” is “full of sorrow, of unspoken sadness, seriousness,—profound melancholy (as some have said) the basis of [his] being” (165):

Urge not this noble silent People: rouse not the Berserkir-rage that lies in them!  
.... Men very peaceable, but men that can be made very terrible! (169)

In contrast, the excessive emotionality of England’s Others was the source of lack of profundity. In *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, Arnold describes the “impressionable Celt, soon up and soon down” (81):

In the comparatively petty art of ornamentation, in rings, brooches, crosiers, relic-cases, and so on, [the Celt] has done just enough to show his delicacy of taste, his happy temperament; but the grand difficulties of painting and sculpture, the prolonged dealings of spirit with matter, he has never had patience for .... All that emotion alone can do in music the Celt has done; the very soul of emotion breathes in the Scotch and Irish airs; but with all this power of musical feeling, what has the Celt, so eager for emotion that he has not patience for science, effected in music ... ? In poetry, again— ... poetry where emotion counts for so much, but where reason, too, reason, measure, sanity, also count for so much—the Celt has shown genius, indeed, splendid genius; but even here his faults have clung to him, and hindered him from producing great works .... he runs off into

technic, where he employs the utmost elaboration, and attains astonishing skill; but in the contents of his poetry you have only so much interpretation of the world as the first dash of a quick, strong perception, and then sentiment, infinite sentiment, can bring you. (82-3)

The austerity of form implicit in ideas about English emotional reserve also informed English plainness, another well-known quality pertinent to *Villette* that promoted middle class masculinity. Arnold claims that the English have “an inaptitude for show and spectacle” which is “better managed by the Latin race, and those whom it has moulded” (17), while in William Thackeray’s *The Paris Sketch Book* (1840), the narrator states, “I can hardly bring my mind to fancy that anything is serious in France—it seems to be all rant, tinsel, and stage-play” (38). The perceived contrast between the pomp of Catholicism and the plainness of Protestantism is relevant here. In 1851, *The Bulwark or Reformation Journal* described the “gaudy shrines” in Catholic churches that “are decked with the costly gifts of servile worshippers” (‘Blight of Popery’ 183), averring that “the Romanist can hardly attain to any spiritual views and feelings of religion amidst this grossness of creature-worship” (184).

English plainness was positioned against the supposed French skill at social graces. Although this could sometimes result in an unattractive bluntness—according to Arnold, the English have a “want of quick instinctive tact” (113)—it was nonetheless agreed to be superior to the insincere “French politeness” demonstrated by a French embodiment of Justice in *The Paris Sketch Book* who responds to (what the narrator considers to be) an absurd poem by Victor Hugo:

Mon cher Monsieur, these verses are charming, *ravissants, délicieux*, and coming from such a *célébrité littéraire* as yourself, shall meet with every possible attention—in fact, had I required anything to confirm my own previous opinions, this charming poem would have done so. Bon jour, mon cher Monsieur Hugo, au revoir. (38)

The contrast between the English and the French extended to their personal appearances. In 'The Lady of Glenwith Grange,' the "perfect miracle of a Frenchman" surprises an Englishman by "w[earing] neither beard, moustachios, nor whiskers" and "dress[ing] in the extreme of plainness and modest good taste" (189). Even French and English art revealed the national differences, as Barrett Browning illustrates in *Aurora Leigh* when she compares French artists to the English, who will "paint a crooked pollard and an ass ... because they find it so / And like it somehow" (6.108-10).

English plainness is inseparable from ideas about frankness, which constituted one part of the honesty that was one of the most popular 'English' traits. In Langford's words, secrecy was considered to be "inconsistent with the straightforward character of an Englishman, who love[d] to indulge in the manly and open avowal of his opinions" (98). The Catholic Church was especially viewed as the antithesis to the natural, candid honesty that was imagined to characterise the English, a belief that informs *Villette* in particular. Catholics were suspected of using subversive tactics to try to convert people to their false faith. As E. R. Norman says, "[i]n the popular imagination it was always the Jesuits ... whose secret network wrought subversion of free constitutions and liberal laws everywhere: part of a grand design to enslave the minds of men in the dark 'medievalism' and 'priestcraft' of the Vatican" (15).

Incidentally, as *Villette* illustrates, the contradictions implicit in the dominant middle class gender ideology surface again with the issue of honesty. Honesty could also suggest self-discipline since, following Luther and Calvin, Protestantism teaches that humans are naturally sinful.<sup>14</sup> It thus becomes a conscious choice against one's natural self, invoking the self-control that was implicitly middle class and masculine.

English plainness and frankness obviously invokes manly sincerity and the masculine plainness that was situated in opposition to feminine occupation with dress and social form. Plainness had greater potential to encompass the lower classes than most other

English qualities according to the dominant discourse, but the plain sincerity of the gentleman—and it is no coincidence that the gentleman should have been widely considered, as Lieber said in agreement with the Frenchman Count Warren, “a type peculiarly Anglican” (9), a notion that will be pursued in greater detail in the following chapters—provides a juncture between these qualities and middle class identity. The relationship of English plainness to language amplifies its implication in the promotion of middle class social power. As Paul Langford says, “‘Plain English,’ or even, by the mid-nineteenth century, ‘plain Saxon’ was a kind of tautology,” unlike French, which was regarded as “a language of compliments” (90). This invokes the plain manners of the middle class gentleman that were positioned in opposition to the artificial manners of the aristocracy. In *The Effects of the Norman Conquest* (1869), the historian Edward A. Freeman denounces the “polite and courtly speech” (535) of France as “the polite and fashionable thing” (536) (the anti-aristocratic elements of this are obvious). Notwithstanding the nationalistic interest in English dialects that emerged in the early nineteenth century, the dialect that was principally celebrated when considering national identity was the equivalent to today’s ‘Received English,’ the development of which, as Patrick Joyce points out in ‘The People’s History: Language and Class in England c.1840-1920,’ received particular impetus during the nineteenth century. The class politics of this are obvious. In addition, one can yet again witness, in the middle class endorsement of genteel speech, evidence of the desire to identify with the aristocracy contradictorily embedded within the dominant discourse of Englishness.<sup>15</sup>

In keeping with English plainness was the belief, apparent in both novels, that Englishness could signify practicality or empiricism, “a disdain for general ideas and theories” (Haseler 20). In *Past and Present*, Carlyle describes the Englishman as a “thick-skinned, seemingly opaque, perhaps sulky, almost stupid Man of Practice” who

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<sup>14</sup> See John Dillenberger and Claude Welch 24-27.

<sup>15</sup> Tellingly, the etiquette book *Enquire Within About Everything*, which according to Joyce had sold 592,000 copies by 1877, “identifie[s] and denounce[s]” “[n]ine versions of Cockney” which include two labelled “Feminine” and “Domestic” (‘People’s English’ 159). It is not surprising that the English language was often characterised as masculine, as in Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, where the “far more manly and expressive Anglo-Saxon” (9) is compared to the language of the Normans. The ascription of masculinity to language is a particularly potent example of the writing of women out of social power. It provides, for

“transcends” the “light adroit Man of Theory, all equipped with clear logic, and able anywhere to give you Why for Wherefore” (164). Walter E. Houghton summarises this mindset as “[a] practical bent of mind, deep respect for facts, pragmatic skill in the adaptation of means to ends, a ready appeal to common sense—and therefore, negatively, an indifference to abstract speculation and imaginative perception” (110). Houghton notes that, while such a quality has always been believed to be “characteristic of the English people,” “[w]hat distinguishes the Victorians is that conditions of life in their period tended to increase the bias, and thus to make anti-intellectualism a conspicuous attitude of the time” (110). This practical, rational mindset with its affinity for orderliness is not only overtly masculine, but also obviously designed for capitalist success. As John Stuart Mill pointed out in 1833, “the extremely *practical* character of the English people” caused them to surpass all other European nations “as men of business and *industriels*” (cited in Houghton 111). The “‘English’ science of political economy” (Buzard 443) further reflects the nationalisation of the middle class masculine business mind. When considered alongside the middle classes, working class irrationality of course implicitly excluded their participation in English practicality.

One final ‘English’ characteristic that is important in *Under Two Flags* was physicality, which is so obviously implicated with masculinity that that aspect requires no further explanation. It is possible at first to imagine that English physicality transcended class, as the working classes were certainly, as Langford points out, “famous, or rather infamous, for aggressive physicality” (46). There was, however, another, nobler dimension to English physicality that gestured towards the ambivalent middle class desire to identify with the aristocratic masculinity that was “based on,” in Davidoff’s and Hall’s words, “sport and codes of honour derived from military prowess, finding expression in hunting, riding, drinking and ‘wenching’” (110).<sup>16</sup> This model of English physicality was the result of a process whereby, in Graham Dawson’s words, the “heroic virtues of English-British manhood became intimately bound up with the imagining of Empire itself” (‘Blonde’

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example, an easy outlet for the derision of women’s literary prowess.

<sup>16</sup> As James Eli Adams says, “In many respects, this regimen marks a revival of aristocratic norms of manhood, and as such seems to have appealed to middle-class men (and boys) anxious to align themselves with more traditional sources of masculine identity” (108).



119). It is aptly illustrated in Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850) when the hero watches a rowing race at Cambridge:

It was a noble sport—a sight such as could only be seen in England—some hundred young men, who might, if they had chosen, been lounging effeminately about the streets, subjecting themselves voluntarily to that intense exertion, for the mere pleasure of toil. The true English stuff came out there ... the stuff which has held Gibraltar and conquered at Waterloo—which has created a Birmingham and a Manchester, and colonized every quarter of the globe—that grim, earnest, stubborn energy, which ... the English possess alone of all the nations of the earth. (143)

This version of English physicality was drawn from two major sources, both of which suggested its implication in social power. The first of these was the public schools, the explicit project of which was to produce the empire's future rulers. The schools' emphasis on producing gentlemen plainly betrays the fact that they were intended to be drawn from the ranks of the privileged classes. The other major source was muscular Christianity, which was also, if less overtly, implicated in the promotion of middle class social power. In particular, Donald E. Hall has shown how the discourse of muscular Christianity was grounded in the maintenance of class divisions, as encapsulated by the body metaphor, in which the working classes were depicted as part of a hierarchised English body that needed to be controlled by the "brain" (49) of the ruling classes.

English physicality, then, along with the other qualities discussed here, testifies to the ways in which the dominant discourse of Englishness in the mid-nineteenth century manufactured middle class, masculine social power. Structured around the same binaries that constructed gender and middle class identity, the dominant discourse of Englishness implicitly excluded women, the working classes and, more ambivalently, the aristocracy, from an English national identity. Women in particular were relegated to a symbolic role in which they performed the universal identity ordained for them by domestic ideology.

These observations are intended to offer insight into the dominant ideology that provided the framework for Brontë's and Ouida's constructions of Englishness in *Villette* and *Under Two Flags*; in the following two chapters I will examine the extent to which they resist or reinforce this power structure.

## CHAPTER 2: *VILLETTE*

Unlike *Under Two Flags*, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* suffers from no shortage of critical attention. Much of this has focused on Brontë's resistance to Victorian gender ideology, beginning roughly with Kate Millett's polemical and ground-breaking essay on *Villette* in *Sexual Politics*, a work that has influenced scholars like Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Sally Shuttleworth. The resistance to the dominant Victorian ideology of femininity implicit in Lucy's rejection of the paintings of the Cleopatra and 'La vie d'une femme,'<sup>1</sup> the Vashti<sup>2</sup> and Lucy's role in the vaudeville<sup>3</sup> has been extensively discussed. Lucy's resistance to the masculine gaze has formed another site of discussion.<sup>4</sup> Issues of class have received less attention than gender. Terry Eagleton's *Myths of Power* is the most famous and complete account, but scholars like Tony Tanner, Russell Poole and Anita Levy have subsequently paid attention to such matters. However, while Brontë's resistance to Victorian gender, if not class ideology, along with Lucy's attempts to forge an identity, constitute probably the most persistent themes in the criticism on *Villette*, few scholars have thought to approach them through the vehicle of national identity.<sup>5</sup>

In a chapter on *Villette* in *Alien Nation: Nineteenth Century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality*, the most thorough account of Englishness in that novel so far, Cannon Schmitt argues that, in the tradition of the Gothic novel, Lucy, the female heroine, "establishes her Englishness by confronting the perils of Continental persecution" and

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of the paintings, see for example Gilbert and Gubar pp420-1; p174 of Rachel M. Brownstein's *Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels*; and Millett pp36-7.

<sup>2</sup> See Lisa Surridge's 'Representing the "Latent Vashti": Theatricality in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*'; Janet Gezari's *Charlotte Brontë and Defensive Conduct: The Author and the Body at Risk* pp128, 138-42; pp125-6 of Mary Jacobus's 'The Buried Letter: Feminism and Romanticism in "Villette"'; pp45-7 of Joseph Litvak's 'Charlotte Brontë and the Scene of Instruction: Authority and Subversion in *Villette*'; pp266-81 of Irene Tayler's *Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë*; and Brownstein pp175-7, to name but a few.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see pp76-7 of Hsiao-Hung Lee's *"Possibilities of Hidden Things": Narrative Transgression in Victorian Fictional Autobiographies*; Gilbert and Gubar pp413-4; Gezari pp129-34; Jacobus pp44-5; and Litvak pp479-82.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Karen Lawrence's 'The Cypher: Disclosure and Reticence in *Villette*'; Lee, pp74-5.

<sup>5</sup> Eagleton begins to do so in his rather short chapter on *Villette*—for example, he identifies the connection between "the English" and "convention," "domesticity" and "gentility" (72)—but his observations are largely peripheral to his main argument.

“metonymically stands in for England itself insofar as she is weak and suffering, subject to persecution” (83). At the same time, he argues, “[t]he text of the novel betrays an awareness of the sinister implications of the necessity for ‘female sacrifice’ in the service of the consolidation of national identity” and, “[a]s a result of such an awareness, the Gothic plot of a woman in danger is accompanied in the novel by another generic pattern: that of a *Bildungsroman* in which the Continental (and also the colonial) Other appears as constituent of the self rather than opposed to it” (84). I am sceptical about this thesis, which appears to rely exclusively, with little supporting evidence, upon the somewhat doubtful proposition that “[i]nsofar as Lucy’s escape to the park [during the opium dream] is framed as a search for self, what she discovers is that the heterogeneous throng is her” (102).

Reina Lewis’s brief discussion of the Cleopatra in *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* more convincingly identifies Lucy utilising a feminine, middle class, English perspective to assert her superiority. Rajani Sudan also considers the “nationalization of domesticity” (137)—specifically, the consumption of food—in an examination of how, “as part of a xenophobic cultural contiguity,” *Villette* “actively represents cultural fantasies about the internal domestic coherence of the mother country” (135). Other accounts of Englishness in *Villette*, such as those by Rosemary Clark-Beattie, Sally Shuttleworth, Jan B. Gordon, Tim Dolin<sup>6</sup> and Enid Duthie, do not really consider gender or class, and, along with Lewis and Sudan, therefore assume that her relationship to Englishness is unproblematic insofar as it aligns with received notions of English national identity. It is this gap that I wish to fill, in order to gain a broader view

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<sup>6</sup> Dolin’s account of Englishness is based on a misinterpretation of Nina Auerbach’s ‘Charlotte Brontë: The Two Countries.’ Auerbach argues that the conflict between “the cold northern climate of Yorkshire” and “the tropical zone of Angria” (328) in Brontë’s early writing reappears in the “extreme and explicit clashes between frost and fire” (338) that figure Lucy’s “conflict between reason and passion or imagination” (329). Dolin mistakenly interprets the metaphorical clash between Yorkshire and Angria literally, arguing that in *Villette* “it is England and Europe, not England and Angria, that emerge as key oppositional elements in the structuring and elaboration of relationships between home and abroad, familiar and strange, marriage and independence” as well as “the principal means by which Brontë can redirect the formal interchanges between the realistic and its antithesis” (55). As I will show, the relationship between reason and passion is far more complex than a simple English/foreign dichotomy. For a start, not only is reason a

of the true extent to which Lucy resists and revises, and remains complicit with, social power.

*Villette* is, I argue, a surprisingly subversive account of mid-Victorian middle class Englishness. While it does not significantly challenge middle class social dominance, it radically renegotiates the gender roles within that discourse, revealing both Brontë's complicity with and resistance to the dominant social power. As the foreign setting is crucial to this project, the commencement of this discussion belongs in the first chapters of the novel, set in England, where Lucy's exclusion from English society fatally threatens the fiction of a unified whole on which the discourse of Englishness relies.

The exclusion from a distinctly English national identity resulting from Lucy's femaleness is magnified by the alienation caused by her refusal to perform the model of femininity that is required of her. She is positioned in opposition to the young Paulina Home, who, as Pauline Nestor shows, functions in the first chapters of the novel as "a typical example of the kinds of socialisation to which females are subjected" (85), "exemplif[ying]" (86) "[i]n her miniature form ... the 'perfect' wife and mother" (85-6). Lucy "amus[es]" herself with a "study" of Paulina's "character" (*Villette* 35). She observes the "disturbingly masochistic dimension of [Paulina's] service" (Nestor 86) when she "lies at Graham's feet and caresses 'the heedless foot' that has just kicked her" (Nestor 86) and again when she tries to hem a handkerchief for her father:

she bored perseveringly with a needle, that in her fingers seemed almost a skewer, pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a track of minute red dots; occasionally starting when the perverse weapon—swerving from her control—inflicted a deeper stab than usual; but still silent, diligent, absorbed, *womanly*. (18-9, my emphasis)

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quality not associated with English *women*, but unhealthy emotional repression is connected with Catholicism in the novel.

Lucy watches as Paulina learns the limits to her inclusion in English society after Graham rejects her in favour of his friends. Later, Graham's unconcern at Paulina's departure contrasts starkly with her grief. Lucy tells her, "you should not grieve that Graham does not care for you so much as you care for him. It must be so .... [b]ecause he is a boy and you are a girl" (39).

Lucy's commentary on Paulina's behaviour reveals surprisingly open resistance to the dominant middle class ideology of femininity. She regards her as "a little Odalisque" (35) who "[o]ne would ... th[ink] ... had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another" (30), and considers her "attentions" to her father "rather absurd" (17): "[c]andidly speaking, I thought her a little busy-body" (18). She observes as Mr. Home, "blind like other parents," apparently views such behaviour as natural, "seem[ing] perfectly content to let her wait on him, and even wonderfully soothed by her offices" (18). He does not appear to notice Paulina fetching his handkerchief, even after she "open[s] the unresisting fingers, and close[s] them upon it one by one"; eventually he "lift[s] her to his knee, and ... neither look[s] at or sp[ea]ks] to the other for an hour following" (17). Cynicism at the lack of recognition to be expected for such service is evident in Lucy's remark that, "I suppose both were satisfied" (17). The unnaturalness of Paulina's behaviour is emphasised by Lucy's repeated reference to her as "a mere doll" (9). The same effect is produced by Lucy's allusion to Paulina's "most unchildlike" "calm" (11), and her recognition that the word "*child*" is "an inappropriate and undescriptive term ... suggesting any picture rather than that of the demure little person in a mourning frock and white chemisette" (18).

Along with her plainness and her marginal social status (of course, insofar as wealth enables one to offset one's looks to the best advantage, the two are connected), Lucy's unwillingness and inability to conform to the dominant conception of femininity prevents her from securing marriage with a respectable man and assuming the role allocated for her by English society. The result is exclusion and alienation from any possibility of a

collective identity.<sup>7</sup> While she is isolated at Bretton, appearing to interact little with the others, Paulina is quickly integrated into the family unit. As Robert Keefe says:

The pretty new doll will become the object of everyone's attention. The godmother takes the waxen thing on her lap and caresses it as she had never done to Lucy ("[she] was not generally a caressing woman"). (157)

Paulina becomes Graham's particular friend, a "league of acquaintanceship" that is "not hastily dissolved" (27).

Most significantly, in a cruel circuit, Lucy's inability to procure a man renders her economically marginal. Her failure either to prove her respectable middle class status with the visible trappings of financial success or alleviate her plainness leaves her vulnerable to negative judgement in the wider world. When she travels to London, she is treated condescendingly by the chambermaid and the waiter, the chambermaid's "spruce attire flaunt[ing] an easy scorn at [her] plain country garb" (56). Only after they realise that she is not a servant do they "hove[r] in a doubtful state between patronage and politeness" (56). Likewise, the stewardess on *The Vivid* initially treats her as though she is barely human (like "a stock" (63), in Lucy's words), arguing about private family matters with her son in her presence. When Lucy pays her with "a coin of more value than, from such a quarter, her coarse calculations had probably reckoned on," she suddenly "not only g[ives] [Lucy] the required direction, but call[s] a commissionaire, and bid[s] him take charge of" (70) her. Ginevra's immediate distaste upon catching sight of Lucy, the cause of which, in Lucy's words, "might be myself, or ... my homely mourning-habit ... more likely both" (64), is another example of the exclusion from English society elicited by her outward appearance. Lucy's alienation is potently encapsulated by the theme of homelessness that haunts the novel: "If I died far away from—home, I was going to say, but I had no home—from England, then, who would

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<sup>7</sup> As Linda Hunt says, Lucy is "denied legitimacy by her society" because "she is unable [and unwilling, one might add] to center her life around ministering to those in her domestic and social circle because she is

weep?” (60). The home is of course doubly resonant, an emblem of material success that is, as explained in the first chapter, central to ideas about middle class Englishness. Lucy contrasts to the Homes and Brettons, whose names are symbolic: “Home” obviously so, while Nina Auerbach notes “the concord between person and place” of the “Bretton[s] of Bretton” (336).<sup>8</sup>

Unable and unwilling to participate in the role assigned to her by the dominant ideology, Lucy resigns herself to isolation and alienation. Accepting a position as Miss Marchmont’s nurse, she takes one of the few respectable jobs available for a middle class woman and, in a striking illustration of the alienation accorded by her social position, describes how “[t]wo hot, close rooms ... became my world” (45). “I ... wanted to compromise with Fate,” she says, “to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains” (46). After Miss Marchmont’s death, however, she is again forced to acknowledge her vulnerability:

What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come?  
Whither should I go? What should I do? (56)

Her solution is to “act out her sense of exile” (Keefe 161) and leave England for the fictional country of Labasseccour.

The foreign setting offers Lucy the possibility of the national identity that she is denied in England. In Labaseccour, her nationality cannot help but be thrown into relief, dissolving the social difference that alienated her from the general English populace. She is still socially marginal, of course, but on the Continent this does not erase her participation in

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allowed none, and she is without the loving protection of a competent male” (23).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Keefe also captures the nationalistic connotations that inform Mrs. Bretton’s and Mr. Home’s names:

Mrs Bretton is Britain, the motherland; Mr Home is the homeland, the fatherland. In capturing the love of both figures, Paulina has made Lucy an expatriot before she ever leaves England. (158)



an imaginary unified English whole. Thus while her speech only marked her difference in England—the speech in London “seemed to [her] odd as a foreign tongue” (55)—in Labassecour the “Fatherland accents” (76) suddenly become a source of community. At Madame Beck’s school, Lucy looks disdainfully upon a “‘maîtresse,’ who had been partly educated in an Irish convent,” for “slaughter[ing] the speech of Albion!” (80) Significantly, Lucy becomes “the English teacher,” an identity that specifically centres on her authority in the English language.

As I will show, in order fully to assign herself a distinctly English identity that simultaneously frees her from restricting and damaging gender stereotypes, Lucy renegotiates the gender roles implicit in discourse about Englishness by appropriating ‘masculine’ qualities in the service of her identity. It is notable, however, that for all that Brontë renegotiates women’s placement in discourse of Englishness and domestic ideology, she is, for the most part, unable to conceptualise Englishness outside masculine discourse. Likewise, Lucy’s experience in England does not, as one might expect, induce her to resist middle class social dominance. Her construction of an English identity is almost always complicit with the promotion of middle class social power that is built into the dominant discourse of Englishness, as her anxiety to point out that she is of the same “degree” (216) as Mrs. Bretton suggests. This is evident from the first, when she debunks the imposter Englishwoman, Mrs. Sweeney, by simultaneously invoking her low social status (which, ironically, is partly marked by her accent):

she boldly declared that she had “had the bringing up of the son and daughter of a marquis.” I think, myself, that she might possibly have been hanger-on—nurse, fosterer, or washer-woman, in some Irish family: she spoke a smothered brogue, curiously overlaid with mincing cockney inflections. (86)

Protestantism, which was, significantly, particularly important to the middle classes, lies at the heart of Lucy's identity.<sup>9</sup> As Rosemary Clark-Beattie points out, Brontë, like many English Protestants, considers that the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism lies in the fact that, in "a blasphemous confusion between human systems and divine law" (Clark-Beattie 822), Catholicism conceptualises morality as a matter of form imposed by the church. Because it does not require personal responsibility, its followers are rendered incapable of independent thought or genuine morality. Conversely, because Protestantism demands that its adherents regulate their own behaviour—that is, exercise the middle class, masculine quality of self-control—they are independent of mind and morally sincere.<sup>10</sup>

Madame Beck's "very un-English" (85) "system" of "Surveillance" (89) epitomises Catholic moral control. With "the physical well-being of her scholars" made as pleasant as possible, she "rule[s] by espionage" "glid[ing] ghost-like through the house, watching and spying everywhere, peering through every key-hole, listening behind every door" and

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<sup>9</sup> As Davidoff and Hall show, the evangelical revival that began in the late eighteenth century was primarily associated with the middle classes. During the nineteenth century, Protestantism was reshaped by and, one might add, itself reshaped:

committed Protestants [who] were concerned with novel forms of creating an ordered existence. They recast notions of diurnal, weekly and annual time in harness to their greater purpose. Holy Days ... were transmuted to the anniversary celebrations of family, church or voluntary society. 'Accounts' were continually cast up with God: had the year been 'time spent in the pleasures of sin for a season or endeavouring to obtain the favour of the Shepherd of Israel?'

Religious beliefs thus supported a rational outlook and the active pursuit of commerce.

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Davidoff and Hall also note how "the concept of work .... was an important part of Evangelical belief" (111).

<sup>10</sup> In an editorial that Brontë reputedly "applauded" (Clark-Beattie 823), George Henry Lewes describes how:

The master-principle of Protestantism ... is the liberty of private judgement. It is the protest of the free Soul against the authority of man.... The great battle that is to be fought is between Authority and Liberty, and men must declare themselves either for the Pope or for Free thought. (Cited in Clark-Beattie 823)

employing a “staff of spies” (90). Lucy finds this “strange house, where no corner [is] sacred from intrusion” (290), alien and hypocritical:

A strange, frolicsome, noisy little world was this school: great pains were taken to hide chains with flowers: a subtle essence of Romanism pervaded every arrangement: large sensual indulgence (so to speak) was permitted by way of counterpoise to jealous spiritual restraint. Each mind was being reared in slavery .... the CHURCH strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning. (157)

Although Madame Beck “seem[s] to know that keeping girls in distrustful restraint” is “not the best way to make them grow up honest and modest women,” she “aver[s] that ruinous consequences w[ill] ensue if any other method [is] tried with continental children—they [are] so accustomed to constraint, that relaxation, however guarded, would be misunderstood and fatally presumed on” (89).

The absence of moral sincerity produced by the Catholic system results in particular in dishonesty. Lucy claims that there is “[n]ot a soul in Madame Beck’s house, from the scullion to the directress herself, [who is] above being ashamed of a lie” (100-1). By contrast, the Protestant system of self-disciplined morality endows Englishwomen with, in Madame Beck’s words, a “more real and reliable probity” (89):

madame knew what honesty was, and liked it—that is, when it did not obtrude its clumsy scruples in the way of her will and interest. She had a respect for “Angleterre”; and as to “les Anglaises,” she would have the women of no other country about her own children, if she could help it. (89)

Even Ginevra, in Lucy’s words, will “never [be] f[ou]nd ... lying, as these foreigners will often lie” (280).

As this suggests, the Protestant system of self-regulation educates its women to be trusted in ways that Catholic women cannot. When Lucy sails alone to the Continent, she remarks:

Foreigners say that it is only English girls who can thus be trusted to travel alone, and deep is their wonder at the daring confidence of English parents and guardians. As for the “jeunes Miss,” by some their intrepidity is pronounced masculine and “inconvenant,” others regard them as the passive victims of an educational and theological system which wantonly dispenses with proper “surveillance.” (65)

Madame Beck is astonished by Lucy’s solo journey: “Il n’y a que les Anglaises pour ces sortes d’entreprises ... sont-elles donc intrépides ces femmes là!” (80) M. Paul is also amazed by Lucy’s “[a]stounding insular audacity!” (251), deeming the painting of the Cleopatra to be unsuitable for an unchaperoned young woman: “how dare you ... sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garçon, and look at *that* picture?” (252). His concern is misplaced, for Lucy is in little danger of being corrupted by the painting’s sensuality:

[the Cleopatra] could not plead a weak spine; she ought to have been standing, or at least sitting bolt upright. She had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought likewise to have worn decent garments ... out of abundance of material—seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery—she managed to make inefficient raiment.

The self-disciplined morality that characterises Brontë’s Englishwomen admits them into the masculine world. With its blatant appeal to masculine sexuality, the Cleopatra belongs to this exclusive world. According to M. Paul, who himself considers her to be “[u]ne femme superbe—une taille d’impératrice, des formes de Junon,” “it [is] quite

proper” (255) for married women to view the Cleopatra: that is, union with a man authorises women to view her. Similarly, in the eyes of foreigners, the singularity of Lucy’s solo journey to Labassecour arises of course from the fact that she is a woman travelling alone. The sense of penetrating masculine culture is further discernible when Lucy breakfasts alone at the Labassecourien inn, where “all present [are] men” (73), and she imagines that they justify her behaviour “by this word ‘Anglaise!’” (73). In an illustration of the possibilities offered by foreign settings for extension and redefinition, the very independence that excluded Lucy from the English community in England is transformed into a marker of her Englishness.

Brontë’s revision of gender roles and her simultaneous complicity with middle class social power are particularly illustrated by Lucy’s English emotional restraint. Paulina recognises this quality, telling Lucy that, “you know you would despise me if I failed in self-control, and whined about some rickety liking that was all on my side” (468) (Lucy replies, “It is true I little respect women or girls who are loquacious either in boasting the triumphs, or bemoaning the mortifications, of feeling” (468)). Throughout the novel, Lucy grapples with the impulse to show emotion, a conflict that is portrayed through the figures of “Reason” and “Feeling” or “Imagination” (287). This conflict divides her when she replies to Graham’s first letter, inducing her and “Feeling” first to “tur[n] Reason out of doors” and “pou[r] out our sincere heart” with “the language of a strongly-adherent affection,” after which “Reason ... leap[s] in, vigorous and revengeful, snatch[es] the full sheets, read[s], sneer[s], erase[s], tear[s] up, re-write[s], fold[s], seal[s], direct[s], and send[s] a terse, curt missive of a page. She did right” (317). As this suggests, Lucy’s emotional restraint is, as the dominant ideology of middle class masculine Englishness directs, symptomatic of the power of her emotions. This spirit is invoked when she describes her regard for the adult Paulina, telling the reader that, “An admiration more superficial might have been more demonstrative; mine, however, was quiet” (466).

Lucy’s emotional restraint distinguishes her from the foreigners in the novel. Ginevra is a particularly apt example, although her role in the novel first requires some explanation.

To an extent, Lucy constructs Ginevra's character as a positive example of Englishness, but she functions more generally as a corrupted Englishwoman, particularly in comparison to Paulina. She is the product of a cosmopolitan lifestyle, exclaiming when she first meets Lucy at "the number of foreign schools I have been at in my life!" (66). She outlines the quality of her education:

"I know nothing—nothing in the world—I assure you; except that I play and dance beautifully,—and French and German of course I know, to speak; but I can't read or write them very well. Do you know they wanted me to translate a page of an easy German book into English the other day, and I couldn't do it ... And then, in matters of information—in history, geography, arithmetic, and so on. I am quite a baby; and I write English so badly—such spelling and grammar, they tell me ...." (66)

Ginevra's cosmopolitan but superficial grasp of language is further emphasised by the way in which her English is littered with French phrases, including the French habit of "substitut[ing] [the] word '*chose*'" (66) for "any missing word in any language she might chance at the time to be speaking" (67). More dangerously, Ginevra has, in her words, "quite forgotten my religion; they call me a Protestant, you know, but really I am not sure whether I am one or not: I don't well know the difference between Romanism and Protestantism" (66). Ginevra's confused national identity directs her preference for de Hamal over Graham, whose appeal for her partly lies in the fact that he has "perfect manners, sweet appearance, with pale interesting face, and hair and eyes like an Italian" (183). Conversely, Graham's Englishness provokes her dislike. She objects to the name John, beseeching Lucy not to "crack my tympanums with your rude Anglicisms" (295), and renames him Isidore. Unsurprisingly, she is aligned with such quintessentially French figures as the coquette and the grisette.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For example, she says to Lucy, "you ... know me to be coquettish, and ignorant, and flirting, and fickle, and silly, and selfish, and all the other sweet things you and I have agreed to be a part of my character"

To return to the discussion of the Englishness of Lucy's emotional restraint, the coquettish Ginevra has a stereotypically French "light, careless temperament" (69) with little depth of feeling, as her heartless treatment of Graham's passion for her reveals. She makes no effort to contain those feelings that she does feel, responding with an "angry reply" (109) or "gleefully" "sparkl[ing]" (108) as her mood directs. The Franco-Spanish Monsieur Paul, a "fiery and grasping little man" (437) with a distinct "absence of what [Lucy] consider[s] desirable self-control" (388), represents another version of foreign lack of self-control. There is no suggestion that his emotionality is not genuine, but he does not have English power: according to Lucy, he wants "the calm of force, [although] its movement and its fire he signally possesse[s]" (275). In contrast to M. Paul and Ginevra, Madame Beck, the cold embodiment of the Catholic system of control, maintains an unruffled demeanour not because of the power of her self-discipline, but because her "peaceful yet watchful eye" has never known "the fire which is kindled in the heart or the softness which flows thence" (88). She is "acute and insensate" (91), and not even her children can elicit a "smile or kiss, or endearing syllable" (113) from her.

Able to control immoral impulses and powerful emotion, Englishwomen in *Villette* are, in place of the middle class English ideal of fragile femininity, characterised by strength. It is this that enables Lucy to travel alone with unknown prospects to the Continent. Brontë's emphasis on Lucy's vulnerability paradoxically highlights her tremendous strength. When she is rowed to the Vivid, the scene is reminiscent of "Charon rowing some solitary soul to the Land of Shades," with "two rude rowers for companions, whose insane oaths ... tortur[e] [her] ear" (61), and who take the opportunity to overcharge her. Similarly, when she reaches Villette she is frightened by "two moustachioed men" who tail her until "turned from the pursuit" by a "sort of patrol" (78).

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(111)., while Lucy later remarks that "no grisette has a more facile faculty of acceptance. Strange! for after all, I know she is a girl of family" (280).

The feminine strength that Protestant morality produces is especially emphasised in Paulina's character. As Lucy says, she has "force, both of feeling and character" (390), for "there is no excellent beauty, no accomplished grace, no reliable refinement, without strength as excellent, as complete, as trustworthy" (391). Paulina contrasts to Ginevra's frenchified weakness. During the "mutual distress" of their seasickness on the voyage across the Channel, Lucy describes how Ginevra "tormented me with an unsparing selfishness ... the whole time" (69), adding, "Many a time since have I noticed, in persons of Ginevra Fanshawe's light, careless temperament, and fair, fragile style of beauty, an entire incapacity to endure: they seem to sour in adversity, like small-beer in thunder" (69).

Another 'masculine' quality that Lucy appropriates in the construction of her Englishness is intellectual capacity, which, insofar as it is connected to self-discipline, also promotes middle class social power. Unaccustomed to the effort that is necessary for academic success, Catholic girls demand that their work be rendered as easy as possible:

Severe or continuous mental application [continental girls] could not, or would not, bear: heavy demand on the memory, the reason, the attention, they rejected point-blank. Where an English girl of not more than average capacity and docility, would quietly take a theme and bend herself to the task of comprehension and mastery, a Labassecourienne would laugh in your face, and throw it back to you with the phrase,—*"Dieu que c'est difficile! Je n'en veux pas. Cela m'ennuie trop."* (102)

"A teacher who underst[ands] her business," Lucy explains sardonically, will "take it back at once, without hesitation, contest, or expostulation—proceed with even exaggerated care to smoothe every difficulty, to reduce it to the level of their understandings, return it to them thus modified, and lay on the lash of sarcasm with unsparing hand" (102). In contrast, Englishwomen's self-disciplined approach to academic work induces Madame Beck to believe in their "superior intelligence" (89).



Similarly, when Lucy and Paulina take German lessons, their tutor, who is “[a]ccustomed to instruct foreign girls, who hardly ever will think and study for themselves—who have no idea of grappling with a difficulty, and over-coming it by dint of reflection or application,” is “astound[ed]” by their “progress, which, in truth, [is] very leisurely” (378). In another episode, a pair of French “professors” are amazed by one of Lucy’s essays, which “was not remarkable at all; it only *seemed* remarkable, compared with the average productions of foreign school-girls; in an English establishment it would have passed scarce noticed” (501). The Englishness of Lucy’s intellect is accentuated by her empirical method of constructing the essay: “I got books, read up the facts, laboriously constructed a skeleton out of the dry bones of the real, and then clothed them, and tried to breathe into them life, and in this last aim I had pleasure” (503). In a similar spirit, she is perplexed by the “[b]lank, cold abstraction” of the topic “Human Justice” (503). It is only after she conceptualises Human Justice as a literal being that she is able to proceed. Lucy’s approach here is doubly significant because it emphasises the rational nature of her intellect, in opposition to the intuition that the dominant middle class discourse situated as characteristically feminine. Rationality was also, of course, implicated in the construction of middle class social power.

The foreign setting allows Brontë covertly to criticise the English fear of female intellectual success by displacing it onto Roman Catholicism and tricking the reader into acknowledging the absurdity of the middle class English femininity to which Lucy is pressured to conform. After venting his outrage at her viewing the Cleopatra, M. Paul directs Lucy to a set of paintings titled ‘La vie d’une femme,’ depicting the Catholic ideal of femininity:

The first represented a “Jeune Fille,” coming out of a church-door, a missal in her hand, her dress very prim, her eyes cast down, her mouth pursed up—the image of a most villainous little precocious she-hypocrite. The second, a “Mariée” with a long white veil, kneeling at a prie-dieu in her chamber, holding her hands plastered together, finger to finger, and showing the whites of her eyes in a most

exasperating manner. The third, a “Jeune Mère,” hanging disconsolate over a clayey and puffy baby with a face like an unwholesome full moon. The fourth, a “Veuve,” being a black woman, holding by the hand a black little girl, and the twain surveying an elegant French monument, set up in the corner of some Père la Chaise. (252-3)

Lucy rejects this passive ideal, deeming the women “insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, *brainless* non-entities!” (253, my emphasis). M. Paul later expands on the Catholic conception of femininity, which continues remarkably to resemble middle class English discourse:

“Woman of intellect” was his next theme: here he was at home. A “woman of intellect,” it appeared, was a sort of “*lusus naturæ*,” a luckless accident, a thing for which there was neither place nor use in creation, wanted neither as wife nor worker. Beauty anticipated her in the first office. He believed in his soul that lovely, placid, and passive feminine mediocrity was the only pillow on which manly thought and sense could find rest for its aching temples; and as to work, male mind alone could work to any good practical result—hein? (445)

M. Paul’s fear of feminine intellect is shown to be ridiculous. As long as Lucy’s intellectual efforts are “marked” by what she calls “a preternatural imbecility” he is gratified, and “words can hardly do justice to his tenderness and helpfulness” (441). However, when her struggles begin “at last to yield to day ... the light change[s] in his eyes from a beam to a spark” and he “harasse[s] [her] ears” with

the bitterest innuendoes against the “pride of intellect.” I was vaguely threatened with, I know not what doom, if I ever trespassed the limits proper to my sex, and conceived a contraband appetite for unfeminine knowledge. (441)

The absurdity of M. Paul's fears is emphasised by his conviction that Lucy has "feigned a false incapacity" (442); in particular, "a chronic suspicion that [she] kn[ows] both Greek and Latin," subjects that were traditionally taught exclusively to boys, "rankle[s]" his "soul" (444). One can, however, see evidence surfacing even here that Brontë is restrained by the very gender ideology that she tries to resist. Lucy is, tellingly, unable to admit to any particular intellectual ambition. Not only does she (somewhat unconvincingly) repeatedly reiterate her lack of individual aptitude, but she minimises her agency in her intellectual enterprises. It is M. Paul who initiates the lessons, and, when he behaves resentfully towards her, Lucy tells him to, "Take [the books] away ... and teach me no more. I never asked to be made learned, and you compel me to feel very profoundly that learning is not happiness" (442).

The ideal of femininity represented by 'La vie d'une femme' assumes a Catholic quality partly through its valorisation of passivity, a quality that would, of course, normally be linked with women in the English mind. In *Villette*, Lucy's Englishness is, on the contrary, partly constructed by her independence of thought. She contrasts to the Catholics, who are superstitiously chained to dogma. In one episode, Lucy is amused by the "somewhat naïv[e]" way in which a pensionnaire parrots Catholic slogans at her:

"Mademoiselle, what a pity you are a Protestant!"

"Why, Isabelle?"

"Parceque, grand vous serez morte—vous brûlerez tout de suite dans l'Enfer."

"Croyez-vous?"

"Certainement que j'y crois: tout le monde le sait; et d'ailleurs le prêtre me l'a dit."

Isabelle ... added, *sotto voce*:

"Pour assurer votre salut là-haut, on ferait bien de vous brûler toute vive ici-bas."

I laughed; as, indeed, it was impossible to do otherwise. (103)

Lucy, on the other hand, appreciates the relative nature of all Christian denominations. To Père Silas's horror, she goes

by turns, and indiscriminately, to the three Protestant Chapels of Vilette—the French, German and the English—*id est*, the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopalian .... I had often secretly wondered at the minute and unimportant character of the differences between these three sects ... I saw nothing to hinder them from being one day fused into one grand Holy Alliance, and I respected them all, though I thought that in each there were faults of form; incumbrances, and trivialities. (525)

In one episode, Lucy notes of a Catholic tract that “Its appeal was not to intellect; it sought to win the affectionate through their affections, the sympathizing through their sympathies” (518). In order to resist its charm, she must consciously exercise rational thought:

I remember one capital inducement to apostacy [sic] was held out in the fact that a Catholic who had lost dear friends by death could enjoy the unspeakable solace of praying them out of purgatory. The writer did not touch on the firmer peace of those whose belief dispenses with purgatory altogether; but I thought of this, and, on the whole, preferred the latter doctrine as the most consolatory. (518)

Lucy speaks approvingly of the way in which Graham “speak[s] directly from his own resources” instead of “borrowing or stealing from books—here a dry fact, and there a trite phrase, and elsewhere a hackneyed opinion” (246). Her self-consciously independent analysis of art is also instructive:

nor did I, in the end, tremble to say to myself, standing before certain *chef d'œuvres* bearing great names, ‘These are not a whit like nature. Nature’s daylight

never had that colour; never was made so turbid, either by storm or cloud, as it is laid out there, under a sky of indigo: and that indigo is not ether; and those dark weeds plastered upon it are not trees.' (249)

As outlined in Chapter 1, this is a familiar English response. It is, of course, ironic that in exercising her English independence of thought Lucy is merely conforming to dominant masculine, English ideas about art. This testifies again to Brontë's inability, for all that she renegotiates gender roles within it, completely to resist the dominant ideology. Her conception of Englishness never leaves the confines of the dominant middle class, masculine discourse.

Another quality that Lucy utilises in the construction of her English identity is plainness, which, if less decisively middle class than certain other popular 'English' qualities, is indubitably masculine. English plainness in *Villette* is again structured around the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism. Unlike Protestantism, which acknowledges the fallibility of human-made religious structures and intercedes as little as possible between God and the individual worshipper, Catholicism is clogged with false and gaudy religious forms:

the more I saw of Popery the closer I clung to Protestantism; doubtless there were errors in every Church, but I now perceived by contrast how severely pure was my own, compared with her whose painted and meretricious face had been unveiled for my admiration .... we kept fewer forms between us and God .... I could not look on flowers and tinsel, on wax-lights and embroidery, at such times and under such circumstances as should be devoted to lifting the secret vision to Him whose home is Infinity .... (528)

The superficial but false effects that characterise the Catholic Church corrupt its worshippers. Lucy considers that Père Silas's speech

might have been made much more truly impressive, if there had been less French, Rousseau-like sentimentalizing and wire-drawing; and rather more healthful carelessness of effect. But the worthy father was obviously a Frenchman born and bred ... he was a true son of Rome; when he did lift his eyes, he looked at me out of their corners, with more and sharper subtlety than, one would have thought, could survive the wear and tear of seventy years. (491)

Lucy also describes the “quick French blood” that “chiefly” imparts an “oil[y] glibness with which flattery and fiction r[u]n from the tongue” (100). This quality is evident in characters like Madame Beck, who may or may not be “sincere” when she “smile[s] approbation” (133). The Parisienne, St. Pierre, especially embodies insincerity. Lucy is told that “the polish” of St. Pierre’s “manner, her seeming attention, her tact and grace, impresse[s] [M. Paul] very favourably,” and remarks herself that “[s]he had, indeed, the art of pleasing, for a given time, whom she liked; but the feeling would not last: in an hour it was dried like dew, vanished like gossamer” (160).

In contrast, Lucy constructs the English as plain, honest and natural, describing the “good-natured but amused smile with which [Graham] always listened to madame’s fluent and florid French” (244). As has already been suggested, Lucy’s English plainness shapes her opinions about art. In keeping with this, she observes of one singer at the concert that “[h]er singing just affected me like the tricks of a conjuror: I wondered how she did it—how she made her voice run up and down, and cut such marvellous capers; but a simple Scotch melody, played by a rude street minstrel, has often moved me more deeply” (270). Lucy prefers the Labassecourien provincial singers, who give “voice without mincing the matter” (271).

Brontë even goes so far as to associate feminine Englishness with a plain appearance. As directed by the familiar English stereotype, the French in *Villette* are accomplished at the art of personal appearance. Rosine is a typical example, “an unprincipled though pretty little French grisette, airy, fickle, dressy, vain, and mercenary” (126). French

accomplishment at dress extends to men: “[l]ike a true Frenchman,” M. Paul “dresse[s] for the ‘situation’ and the occasion” (424). The artificiality and insincerity associated with such expertise is encapsulated by this comment:

foreigners, even such as are ungraceful in domestic privacy, seem to possess the art of appearing graceful in public: however blunt and boisterous those every-day and home movements connected with peignoir and papillotes, there is a slide, a bend, a carriage of the head and arms, a mien of the mouth and eyes, kept nicely in reserve for gala use—always brought out with the grande toilette, and duly put on with the “parure.” (263)

The implicit contrast is with the English, who, this passage suggests, maintain a consistent appearance on all occasions. Similar sentiments are expressed when Lucy admires Ginevra’s hair, which “look[s] *like* hair, and wave[s] from her head, long, curled, and flowing” (269). She prefers it, she says, to the “shell[s] or ... skull-cap[s] of the “foreign damsels” (269). Notably, Mrs Sweeney, the imposter Englishwoman, is “heterogeneously clad in a broad-striped showy silk dress and a stuff apron” (84). In this way, the plainness of Lucy’s dress becomes a marker of her Englishness; a rejection of the Catholic, French obsession with superficial effects. Lucy’s taste for plain, grey dresses indubitably stems from her desire not to draw attention to herself, but it also reflects her refusal to deny her deficiencies, as manifested in the brutal honesty that forces her to admit that her reflection in the theatre mirror is “not flattering” (262).

Lucy’s English identity fits her for masculine, middle class economic labour. This role itself becomes a sign of her Englishness, both cementing the unconscious complicity in middle class social power that underscores her Englishness and emphasising the magnitude of her renegotiation of gender mores. Like a middle class man, Lucy labours for independence to avert the shame of accepting money without honest work. This ethic is foreign to the inhabitants of Villette. Rosine “unscrupulously” accepts gold from Graham because she has “no idea that there could be any disgrace in grasping at whatever

she c[an] get” (150). Lucy also disapprovingly tells Ginevra that “I have not the least respect for your feathers, Miss Fanshawe ... very pretty things, if you had bought them with money which was your own, and which you could well spare, but not at all pretty under present circumstances” (109). Lucy’s morally admirable goal of independence contrasts, too, with the teacher who suffers from “avarice”:

In her reigned the love of money for its own sake. The sight of a piece of gold would bring into her eyes a green glisten, singular to witness. She once, as a mark of high favour, took me upstairs, and, opening a secret drawer, showed me a hoard—a mass of coarse, large coin—about fifteen guineas, in five-franc pieces. She loved this hoard as a bird loves its eggs. (155)

Lucy’s ethical economics contrast further with those of Madame Beck, whose Catholic coldness is linked to mercenary commercial enterprise. Madame Beck is, Lucy says with a somewhat derogatory air, bourgeois: she “look[s] well, though a little bourgeoisie: as bourgeoisie, indeed, she [is]” (88). The French term, which implicitly differs from the “middle-class, English” (273) identity that Lucy ascribes to Mrs. Bretton, is telling (Terry Eagleton points out how it is the word “English” that “mak[es] the difference, since the Belgian burghers are universally despised” (70)). Like the Catholic church that seeks to magnify its wealth, Madame Beck coldly promotes her “interest,” the material success of her school:

interest was the master-key of madame’s nature—the alpha and omega of her life. I have seen her *feelings* appealed to, and I have smiled in half-pity, half-scorn at the appellants. None ever gained her ear through that channel. On the contrary, to attempt to touch her heart was the surest way to rouse her antipathy, and to make of her a secret foe .... Never was the distinction between charity and mercy better exemplified than in her. While devoid of sympathy, she had a sufficiency of rational benevolence: she would give in the readiest manner to people she had



never seen—rather, however, to classes than to individuals. “Pour les pauvres,” she opened her purse freely—against *the poor man*, as a rule, she kept it closed. (90-1)

The reference to charity as a practical morality divorced from personal ethics reinforces the parallel between Madame Beck’s “system” and that of the Catholic Church. Coolly working towards financial gain—as Lucy says, “there was measure and sense in her hottest pursuit of self-interest, calm and considerateness in her closest clutch of gain” (364)—Madame Beck is unmoved by moral concerns. She has no scruples about using unethical means for pragmatic ends, seeking to deny Lucy’s love for M. Paul, not because she loves him, but because “she want[s] to marry, that she might bind him to her interest” (559).

As has already been suggested by the text’s failure so far to maintain unbroken resistance to the dominant ideology, Lucy’s appropriation of a masculine, middle class English identity is not straightforward. Brontë in fact betrays awareness that this identity is only possible outside English society. Before Lucy is forced to acknowledge the Brettons’ presence (and this may partly account for her withholding her identity from Graham), her alliance with Ginevra enables her to maintain a sort of a fiction of belonging to an English community. While Lucy professes not to know “why I chose to give my bread rather to Ginevra than to another; nor why, if two had to share the convenience of one drinking-vessel ... I always contrived that she should be my convive” (293), the source of her affinity is made clear a few paragraphs later:

When I first came, it would happen once and again that a blunt German would clap me on the shoulder, and ask me to run a race; or a riotous Labassecourienne seize me by the arm and drag me towards the play-ground ... but all these little attentions had ceased some time ago ... I had now no familiar demonstration to dread or endure, save from one quarter; and as that was English I could bear it. (294)

Lucy suggests here that her isolation from the inhabitants of Labassecour is the consequence of a conscious choice not to associate with foreigners. She claims, “I might have had companions, and I chose solitude” (155), describing how “[e]ach of the teachers in turn made me overtures of special intimacy” (155). Lucy “trie[s] them all” (155), she says, and rejects each one for their immorality.

The presence of the Brettons and Homes collapses this fantasy. After a nervous breakdown that results in Lucy visiting a Catholic confessional, she is taken in by the Brettons, who happen to be staying in Villette. She wakes up to find “Bretton! Bretton! and ten years ago sh[ining] reflected in [the] mirror” (212). Suddenly, the domestic vision of Englishness that the foreign setting allowed her to suppress is present again, the home in Bretton that symbolised her alienation from the English community bizarrely lifted intact to haunt her in Labassecour:

How pleasant it was in its air of perfect domestic comfort! How warm in its amber lamp-light and vermilion fire-flush! To render the picture perfect, tea stood ready on the table—an English tea, whereof the whole shining service glanced at me familiarly; from the solid silver urn, of antique pattern, and the massive pot of the same metal, to the thin porcelain cups, dark with purple and gilding. I knew the very seed-cake of peculiar form, baked in a peculiar mould, which always had a place on the tea-table at Bretton. Graham liked it, and there it was as of yore—set before Graham’s plate with the silver knife and fork beside it. (217)

The itemisation of property in this passage—the fireplace, tea-set, and cutlery set—potently symbolises the middle class domestic vision of Englishness from which Lucy is excluded by her economic status. She immediately recognises that she has no part in this domestic English world. “[S]teep[ing]” her “pillow with tears,” she “entreat[s] Reason” to moderate her desires:

Do not let me think of them too often, too much, too fondly ... let me not run athirst, and apply passionately to its welcome waters: let me not imagine in them a sweeter taste than earth's fountains know. Oh! would to God—I may be enabled to feel enough sustained by an occasional, amicable intercourse, rare, brief, unengrossing and tranquil: quite tranquil! (223)

She and Mrs. Bretton are, as she says, vastly different people:

The difference between [Mrs. Bretton] and me might be figured by that between the stately ship, cruising safe on smooth seas, with its full complement of crew, a captain gay and brave, and venturous and provident; and the life-boat, which most days of the year lies dry and solitary in an old, dark, boat-house, only putting to sea when the billows run high in rough weather, when cloud encounters water, when danger and death divide between them the rule of the great deep. (226)

This sense of profound difference is also true with regard to Graham and Paulina. Lucy believes that the world is divided into those whose “lives *are* blessed” (473) and those who “hold their span of life on conditions of denial and privation” (453). While she resigns herself to belonging in the latter class, she believes that Graham and Paulina were born under a “fortunate” “star” (472). Lucy's sense of alienation from the Brettons is so profound that she withholds her identity from them, first when she recognises Graham at Madame Beck's school, and then again when she finds herself in the Brettons' home, only divulging her identity after Mrs. Bretton recognises her.

Lucy's fears are justified. The English ‘community’ is reduced to a system of patronage that renders her a “grovelling, groping, monomaniac” (308) over a single letter.<sup>12</sup> Her

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, the intensity of Lucy's response is also due to her feelings of love for Graham. This does not diminish my point that she is extremely grateful for the simple fact of social contact that his letters provide. This is not surprising, given the prior intense loneliness that lead to physical illness (193). Witness Lucy's extreme delight at going to the concert: “I am quiet ... because I am so very, *very* much interested: not merely with the music, but with everything about me” (271).

friendship with Graham is a “curious one-sided friendship; only on one hand truth, and on the other perhaps a jest” (454). A “man who, in appreciating the gem, [cannot] forget its setting” (463), he is incapable of fully comprehending Lucy, whose family is equal to his but who lacks beauty or, even more crucially, the visible trappings of material success:

Ah, Graham! I have given more than one solitary moment to thoughts and calculations of your estimate of Lucy Snowe: was it always kind or just? Had Lucy been intrinsically the same, but possessing the additional advantages of wealth and station, would your manner to her, your value for her have been quite what they actually were? (392)

Lucy recounts how Graham “accord[s] to [her] presence in the room just that degree of notice and consequence a person of [her] exterior generally expects: that is to say, about what is given to unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner’s work, and carpets of no striking pattern” (119); the deficiency in Lucy’s appearance, one assumes, is a lack of wealth and beauty.

Ginevra, on the other hand, is not just beautiful but, Graham “know[s],” a “girl of family” (280). Paulina’s appeal for Graham also crucially hinges upon her visible social status:

Had he seen Paulina with the same youth, beauty, and grace, but on foot, alone, unguarded, and in simple attire, a dependent worker, a demi-grisette, he would have thought her a pretty little creature, and would have loved with his eye her movements and her mien, but it required other than this ... to bring him safe under dominion as now, without loss, and even with gain to his manly honour—one saw that he was reduced; there was about Dr. John all the man of the world; to satisfy himself did not suffice; society must approve—the world must admire what he did, or he counted his measures false and futile. In his victrix he required *all that was here visible*—the imprint of high cultivation, the

consecration of a careful and authoritative protection, the adjuncts that Fashion decrees, Wealth purchases, and Taste adjusts; for these conditions his spirit stipulated ere it surrendered. (463-4, my emphasis)

After Paulina's return, Graham's slight gestures of friendship to Lucy cease: he sends her no more letters, although he is aware of the value that her loneliness and isolation causes her to place on them. When Lucy next visits the Brettons' home, it is to discover that Paulina has usurped her place; she is an "intruder" (343) in Lucy's "own little sea-green room" (342).

For all Lucy's attempts to incorporate the Brettons and Homes into her vision of Englishness, the very characteristics upon which she constructs her identity collapse in their presence and their more conventional ideas about femininity. Graham in particular functions as the mouthpiece for the dominant masculine English discourse that was at the heart of Lucy's English identity. Graham's vision of Ginevra, whom he erroneously constructs as an idealised middle class Englishwoman, focuses on her innocent virtue: she is "thoroughly artless" (185), a "[g]raceful angel" or "simple, innocent, girlish fairy" (186) who "pours into [Lucy's] ear her pure, child-like confidences" (186-7). This plainly invokes the dominant middle class ideology of natural feminine virtue and has little in common with Lucy's self-controlled Protestant morality. This stereotypical middle class view of femininity is particularly evident in Graham's refusal to acknowledge female passion. The Vashti of course is the incarnation of emotion:

To her, what hurts becomes immediately embodied: she looks on it as a thing that can be attacked, worried down, torn in shreds. Scarcely a substance herself, she grapples to conflict with abstractions. (322)

Lucy asks Graham, "How did he like Vashti?":

“Hm-m-m,” was the first scarce articulate but expressive answer; and then such a strange smile went wandering round his lips, a smile so critical, so almost callous! I suppose that for natures of that order his sympathies *were* callous. In a few terse phrases he told me his opinion of, and feeling towards, the actress: he judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgement. (325)

Graham’s heart, Lucy explains,

held no chord for enthusiasm: to bright, soft, sweet influences his eyes and lips gave bright, soft, sweet welcome ... for what belonged to storm, what was wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming, he had no sympathy and with it held no communion .... [Vashti’s] agony did not pain him, her wild moan—worse than a shriek—did not much move him; her fury revolted him somewhat, but not to the point of horror. Cool young Briton! The pale cliffs of his own England do not look down on the tides of the channel more calmly than he watched the Pythian inspiration of that night. (324)

Although this passage does not openly refer to female passion, the reference to “bright, soft, sweet influences” thinly disguises the gender politics at play. Lisa Surridge points out how the passage “links the actress to Lucy’s own emotional climaxes (consistently represented as storm), and implies that by failing to respond to Vashti, Dr John has failed to respond to *her*” (9). It is also significant that Graham’s reaction is described as specifically English. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar note that the Vashti herself is aware she is “damned” for her refusal to conform to the strictures of “proper society” (48):

Fallen, insurgent, banished, she remembers the heaven where she rebelled. Heaven’s light, following her exile, pierces its confines, and discloses their forlorn remoteness. (*Villette* 323)

Mr. Home, who misjudges Lucy as “a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional perhaps, but still the pink and pattern of governess-correctness” (375), also demonstrates the inability of those speaking from within the dominant English discourse to recognise Lucy’s passions. Lucy ironically recalls how “M. de Bassompierre, the other day, politely turned the conversation when it ran on the wild gifts of the actress Vashti, because, as he kindly said, ‘Miss Snowe looked uncomfortable’” (420). Contrary to Mr. Home’s opinion, Lucy is drawn towards and fascinated (although simultaneously repelled) by her, deeming her “a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation”:

Where was the artist of the Cleopatra? Let him come and sit down and study this different vision. Let him seek here the mighty brawn, the muscle, the abounding blood, the full-fed flesh he worshipped: let all materialists draw nigh and look on. (322)

This perspective is, as Nestor points out, recognised by both Lucy and Paulina. Paulina replies carefully when Graham confesses his love for her:

“I replied briefly, but I did not repulse him. Yet I almost trembled for fear of making the answer too cordial: Graham’s tastes are so fastidious. I wrote it three times—chastening and subduing the phrases at every rescript ... till it seemed to me to resemble a morsel of ice flavoured with ever so slight a zest of fruit or sugar ... ” (471)

Lucy responds approvingly: “Excellent, Paulina! Your instinct is fine; you understand Dr. Bretton” (471). She later says that Paulina’s letters “must have appeared to [Graham] beautiful”:

They had not been written ... to express her love. On the contrary, it appeared that she had proposed to herself the task of hiding that feeling, and bridling her love's ardour. (533)

The dominant English discourse that refuses to acknowledge female self-control dismantles the inner strength that was an important part of Lucy's English identity. Lucy describes how Paulina's strength is more

than most people thought—than Graham himself imagined—than she would ever show to those who did not wish to see it .... Graham would have started had any suggestive spirit whispered of the sinew and the stamina sustaining that delicate nature; but I, who had known her as a child, knew, or guessed, by what a good and strong root her graces held to the firm soil of reality. (391)

Graham's ignorance of Paulina's strength, and her implicit defensiveness about revealing it to him, suggest the refusal of those speaking through the perspective of masculine Englishness to acknowledge the strength of Englishwomen. Unsurprisingly, female intellect also has no place in this conception of Englishness. Graham imagines Ginevra's mind, with her "pure, child-like confidences" (186-7), as infantile, and postulates that her handwriting that "must be pretty, light, *ladylike*" (236, my emphasis). Subversively, Lucy suggests that, in spite of his limited conception of femininity, Paulina's superior intelligence unconsciously predisposes Graham towards her: "[Ginevra's] light, disconnected prattle might have gratified Graham once; perhaps it pleased him still: perhaps it was only fancy which suggested the thought that, while his eye was filled and his ear fed, his taste, his keen zest, his lively intelligence, were not equally consulted and regaled" (389-90). The absurdity of Graham's inability to acknowledge feminine intellect is strikingly evident when he tells Lucy that "I believe if you had been a boy, Lucy, instead of a girl—my mother's god-son instead of her god-daughter—we should have been good friends: our opinions would have melted into each other" (392).



The work ethic that distinguished Lucy from the frivolous foreigners is also incomprehensible in English eyes:

“Miss Snowe is in a school?” [asked Paulina.]

“I am a teacher,” I said. (354)

Paulina “fixe[s] on” Lucy

a pair of eyes wide with wonder—almost with dismay.

“Are you a teacher?” cried she .... “ .... But do you really teach here, in Villette?”

“I really do.”

“And do you like it?”

“Not always.”

“And why do you go on with it?”

....

“Chiefly, I fear, for the sake of the money I get.”

“Not then from motives of pure philanthropy? [asked Mr. Home.] Polly and I were clinging to that hypothesis, as the most lenient way of accounting for your eccentricity.”

“No—no, sir. Rather for the roof of shelter I am thus enabled to keep over my head; and for the comfort of mind it gives me to think that while I can work for myself, I am spared the pain of being a burden to anybody.”

“Papa, say what you will, I pity Lucy.” (355-6)

Admittedly, Mr. Home’s response here is kind, although perhaps tellingly Lucy emphasises his Scottishness. However, even he does not fully apprehend Lucy’s reasons for working, as is revealed when he offers her “the office of companion to his daughter” (371). Even though he offers her “thrice [Lucy’s] present salary,” Lucy says, “I would

deliberately have taken a house-maid's place, bought a strong pair of gloves, swept bedrooms and staircases, and cleaned stoves and locks, in peace and independence," rather than be a "bright lady's shadow" (371).

Unsurprisingly, Paulina's presence also undermines the idea that a plain female appearance is distinctively English. Unlike Ginevra, Paulina cannot be dismissed as merely frenchified, and in her presence Lucy's plain dress becomes a negative sign. Graham says, damningly, that "Lucy's disadvantages spring from over-gravity in tastes and manner—want of colour in character and costume" (420). His assessment here is telling in a more general sense, gesturing towards the way in which, stripped of qualities like her emotional self-control, the passions that it masks, her tremendous strength and her middle class work ethic, and lacking the beauty and visible social status that would make her signify as a middle class woman, Lucy becomes a creature without character; a "neutral, passive thing" (127). To the English, she is "know[n] ... only as 'quiet Lucy'—'a creature inoffensive as a shadow'" (420), the insubstantiality of the shadow to which she is compared encapsulating the reduction of her identity to nothingness.

The pain of being judged by a superficial conception of femininity that obscures one's self echoes throughout the novel: "These epithets—these attributes I put from me. His 'quiet Lucy Snowe,' his 'inoffensive shadow,' I gave him back; not with scorn, but with extreme weariness: theirs was the coldness and the pressure of lead; let him overwhelm me with no such weight" (394). The idiocy of the dominant middle class gender ideology is most overtly expressed through the absurd vision of idealised womanhood that Graham's passion for Ginevra induces him to impose on her. In one episode, Graham concludes a particularly preposterous rhapsody by telling Lucy that, "She is so lovely, one cannot but be loving towards her. You—every woman older than herself, must feel for [her] a sort of motherly or elder-sister fondness" (186-7). Lucy exposes the wilfully constructed nature this vision of femininity by instead applying it to men:

“But excuse me, Dr. John, may I change the theme for one instant? What a god-like person is that de Hamal! What a nose on his face—perfect! Model one in putty or clay, you could not make a better, or straighter, or neater; and then, such classic lips and chin—and his bearing—sublime! .... You, Dr. John, and every man of a less refined mould than he, must feel for him a sort of admiring affection, such as Mars and the coarser deities may be supposed to have borne the young, graceful Apollo.” (187)

Ginevra herself dislikes having idealised femininity imposed on her, declaring that Graham

“expects something more of me than I find it convenient to be. He thinks I am perfect: furnished with all sorts of sterling qualities and solid virtues, such as I never had, nor intend to have .... ” (111)

Even Graham seems to acknowledge the nature of his fantasy: Lucy describes seeing “a blue, subtle ray spe[e]d sideways from Dr. John’s eye” that “half le[ads] [her] to think that part, at least, of his professed persuasion of Miss Fanshawe’s *naïveté* [is] assumed” and that “his passion for her beauty, his appreciation of her foibles might possibly be less mistaken, more clear sighted, than from his general language [is] presumable” (243).

Lucy’s criticism of Paulina’s complicity with the dominant middle class gender ideology is subtler. In one episode she compares her to the spaniel Sylvie: “I never saw her, but I thought of Paulina de Bassompierre: forgive the association, reader, it *would* occur” (521). Brontë has, of course, used the name Sylvie before, to describe the passive Catholic girl in *The Professor*:

destined as she was for the cloister, her whole soul was warped to a conventual bias, and, in the tame, trained, subjection of her manner, one read that she had already prepared herself for her future course of life by giving up her

independence of thought and action into the hands of some despotic confessor.

She permitted herself no original opinion, no preference of companion or employment, in everything she was guided by another. With a pale, passive, automaton-air she went about all day long doing what she was bid, never what she liked or what, from innate conviction, she thought it right to do; the poor little future religieuse had been early taught to make the dictates of her own reason and conscience quite subordinate to the will of her spiritual Dictator. (102)

(The parallel here again suggests the displacement of middle class discourse of femininity onto Catholic femininity.) Paulina also remains unnatural in Lucy's eyes, the first glimpse of her at the Brettons' home in Villette revealing a "spectral illuso[n]": "an airy, fairy thing—small, slight, white—a winter spirit" (343). Paulina's dress of "white, sprinkled slightly with drops of scarlet" (343) echoes the masochism in the opening chapters of the novel. Jennifer Oldfield points out, too, how "[w]hite is the absence of colour, and there is a missing factor too in [Paulina's] development, leaving her an unreal figure" (181). As I have already suggested, even Paulina appears to be aware of the artificiality of the part that she plays, an awareness that is earlier evident in the opening chapters of the novel. "While [Paulina] lavish[ed] her eccentricities regardlessly before me" Lucy recounts, "she never showed my godmother one glimpse of her inner self: for her she was nothing but a docile, somewhat quaint little maiden" (38). Tellingly, of all the English characters in the novel, only Paulina, Lucy's partner in deception, recognises her inner strength. As Lucy says, "If any one knew me it was little Paulina" (376).

Lucy's English identity, and the possibility of new gender roles that it offers, are, ultimately, only available outside England and its inhabitants. While she is in a sense free in the company of foreigners to construct her own identity, the presence of other English people, who demand that she conform to their own versions of Englishness, threatens her identity. It is no coincidence that Lucy unites with a foreigner. Instead of erasing her identity, M. Paul casts her Englishness into relief. Lucy positions "that inquisitive restlessness, that absence of what I considered desirable self-control" (388) in opposition

to her own self-discipline. In the face of M. Paul's efforts to elicit passion from her, she finds "a certain pleasure in keeping cool, and working him up" (251):

I kept my seat of punishment ... with ... a certain smugness of composure .... It seemed as if the presence of a nature so restless, chafing, thorny as that of M. Paul, absorbed all feverish and unsettling influences like a magnet, and left me none but such as were placid and harmonious. (416)

She "like[s] ... to see M. Emanuel jealous .... There [is] a relish in his anger" (191). Unlike the English, M. Paul, for all his hyperbole, also recognises Lucy's passion, and thus the magnitude of her self-restraint:

"I know you! I know you! Other people in this house see you pass, and think that a colourless shadow has gone by. As for me, I scrutinized your face once, and it sufficed." (191)

He detects her "keen relish for dramatic expression" (174):

"Were you not gratified when you succeeded in that *vaudeville*? I watched you, and saw a passionate ardour for triumph in your physiognomy. What fire shot into the glance! Not mere light, but flame: je me tins pour averti." (191-2)

Ultimately, their union is based around the acceptance of difference and the recognition of similarity within that difference. As M. Paul says:

"You are patient, and I am choleric; you are quiet and pale, and I am tanned and fiery; you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike—there is affinity ...." (460)

This, importantly, encompasses religious differences:

Adherent to his own religion ... he freely left me my pure faith .... He said:—

“Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you. I own its severe charm. There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for Lucy.” (616)

Lucy reciprocates M. Paul’s acceptance of their different faiths: “I would not trouble your faith; you believe in God and Christ and the Bible, and so do I” (524).

Unlike *The Professor*, in which Crimsworth and Frances return to England where, as Firdous Azim points out, Frances is anglicised and incorporated into the English community, Lucy shows no sign of intending to leave Villette. Neither do the Brettons seem to have much part in Lucy’s future, the last sentences of the novel only detailing the fates of the French characters. Instead, Lucy marshals the middle class, masculine qualities that constitute her English identity to obtain both her own successful business, the definitive middle class masculine goal, and the home that she was denied in England. Her school is simultaneously the site of her economic success and a Labassecourien alternative to the English home:

Opening an inner door, M. Paul disclosed a parlour, or salon—very tiny, but I thought, very pretty. Its delicate walls were tinged like a blush; its floor was waxed; a square of brilliant carpet covered its centre; its small round table shone like the mirror over its hearth; there was a little couch, a little chiffonnière—the half-open, crimson-silk door of which, showed porcelain on the shelves; there was a French clock, a lamp; there were ornaments in biscuit china; the recess of the single ample window was filled with a green stand, bearing three green flower-pots, each filled with a fine plant glowing in bloom; in one corner appeared a guéridon with a marble top, and upon it a work-box, and a glass filled with violets in water. (604)

The fusion of the English and the continental is signified by the “hearth,” which is present instead of the “black stoves” (289) that take the place of English firesides in Labassecour, and the “coffee service of china” (605) that replaces the English tea set. Thus while in England Lucy is excluded from the English community by her inability to participate in the economic world, in Villette such participation enables her to procure the very thing that lay at the heart of her exclusion. As Jan B. Gordon points out, Belgium was a particularly appropriate site for Brontë to construct an alternative vision of Englishness, since when she travelled there in 1842 it “was a new and, in its ideological associations, an ‘empty’ European country” (9). Perhaps it is also significant that Lucy herself emphasises the importance of the novel’s location by suggesting that her economic success is only viable in Villette: “Living costs little ... in this economical town of Villette, where people are more sensible than I understand they are in dear old England—ininitely less worried about appearance, and less emulous of display—where nobody is in the least ashamed to be quite as homely and saving as he finds convenient” (452).

M. Paul’s role in Lucy’s attainment of home and independence is potentially problematic. After all, it is he who acquires the school, which suggests that Lucy has not after all achieved independence. But Lucy’s agency is crucial. It is she who commences the plan: she had been “doing [her] best to save what would enable [her] to put it in practice,” and M. Paul acquires the school after hearing her “tal[k] once ... of trying to be independent and keeping a little school of [her] own” (603). Significantly, the economic responsibility of the house does not rest with M. Paul. He does not own it, and Lucy is entirely responsible for the rent, financing the first year out of her savings, after which she must “trust God, and herself” (609). Lucy’s independence is such that M. Paul’s death has no economic impact on her: the school “flourishes” (616) and expands, and there is no indication that her success does not continue into the future.

Kate Millett claims that Lucy “hoodwink[s]” M. Paul into “giving her the keys” and finds freedom “alone” (146) after his death. However, it is possible to interpret the connection between male and female economic independence as much less divisive. One could argue that, in helping Lucy acquire financial independence, M. Paul is going some way towards rectifying the uneven balance of economic power:

“Plenty of money! .... The disposal of my large teaching-connection put me in possession of a handsome sum: with part of it I determined to give myself the richest treat that I *have* known or *shall* know .... ” (607)

Since Lucy and M. Paul are both teachers, the unfairness is plain. Lucy makes just this point when describing her transition from nursery governess to English teacher: “Madame raised my salary; but she got thrice the work out of me she had extracted from Mr. Wilson, at half the expense” (99).

Lucy needs M. Paul for another reason. For all that Brontë has her appropriate a middle class masculine project, she neither wishes her to relinquish her femininity nor entirely discard the dominant middle class English vision of domesticity. Lucy “d[oes] not like” (384) Ginevra’s habit of “lean[ing] upon [her] her whole weight” (383-4) because “I [am] not a gentleman, or her lover” (384). She also vehemently resists St. Pierre’s attempts to dress her in men’s clothes:

To be dressed like a man did not please, and would not suit me. I had consented to take a man’s name and part; as to his dress—*halte là!* No. I would keep my own dress, come what might. (171)

Lucy does things “in [her] own way” (171-2), “[r]etaining [her] woman’s garb without the slightest retrenchment” and “merely assum[ing] in addition, a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a paletot of small dimensions” then “ma[king] up the long back hair close,



and brush[ing] the front hair to the side” (172). This mixture of masculine and feminine symbols encapsulates Brontë’s ultimate vision for the role of gender in her reconstructed Englishness. Rather than remodel femininity as middle class masculinity, Lucy’s construction of Englishness endeavours to blur the demarcation between masculine and feminine roles.<sup>13</sup>

Lucy’s school modifies, but does not relinquish, the middle class English domestic vision: the love of a caring man is an essential part of her self-fulfilment. Contrary to Millett’s sarcastic view, M. Paul’s love is positive. It validates Lucy’s self-worth: “I was full of faults; he took them and me all home” (612). He reassures her about the lack of beauty that has haunted her throughout the novel, again signalling Brontë’s inability completely to resist middle class ideology of English femininity:

“Ah! I am not pleasant to look at—?”

I could not help saying this; the words came unbidden: I never remember the time when I had not a haunting dread of what might be the degree of my outward deficiency; this dread pressed me at the moment with special force.

....

“Do I displease your eyes *much*?” I took courage to urge: the point had its vital import for me.

He stopped, and gave me a short, strong answer ... which silenced, subdued, yet profoundly satisfied. Ever after that, I knew what I was for *him*; and what I might be for the rest of the world, I ceased to care. (602-3)

Nor does Lucy’s love entail absolute relinquishment of traditional feminine domesticity. She takes a “delight inexpressible in tending M. Paul” (608) with tea:

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<sup>13</sup> As Surridge points out, theatre, which in the nineteenth century allowed women to dress in men’s clothes, offers the opportunity legitimately to “play” (840) with gender mores.

I promised to do all he told me .... "I will be your faithful steward," I said ....  
 he gently raised his hand to stroke my hair; it touched my lips in passing; I  
 pressed it close, I paid it tribute. He was my king ... to offer homage was both a  
 joy and a duty. ( 607)

For all Lucy's joy, though, there is something threatening about this. M. Paul's presence inevitably undermines the independence that is crucial to her identity. In a sense, his death is a compromise, enabling Lucy to experience love and ensuring her independence. This independence is, incidentally, partly assured by the removal of the threat of motherhood, an outcome that also relieves Brontë of the need to confront the possibility of Lucy performing a symbolic role as the English mother of the nation's future empire builders. Despite what Millett claims, however, M. Paul's death is no triumph. It is his loving existence that makes the three years that he is away "the three happiest years of [her] life" (614).

As mentioned, M. Paul acknowledges the passions that those speaking from the dominant English discourse will not. He performs an important function in the novel, helping Lucy come to terms with her passions, especially her sexuality. Lucy's repression of sexual passion in particular indicates that she is still trapped by the Victorian middle class ideology that condemns female passion as immoral:

And away I flew, never once checked, reader, by the thought which perhaps at this moment checks you: namely that to go anywhere with Graham and without Mrs. Bretton could be objectionable. I could not have conceived, much less have expressed, to Graham such thought—such scruple—without risk of exciting a tyrannous self-contempt; of kindling an inward fire of shame so quenchless, and so devouring, that I think it would soon have licked up the very life in my veins.  
 (319)

Unsurprisingly, Graham voices the dominant middle class English fear of female sexuality. As Helene Moglen and Mary Jacobus point out, the Vashti, whom Graham dismisses so damningly, also symbolises sexual passion. Tellingly, the apprehension of Ginevra's sexuality induces Graham to end his passion for her:

“what I refer to was not flirtation: it was a look marking mutual and secret understanding—it was neither girlish nor innocent. No woman, were she as beautiful as Aphrodite, who could give or receive such a glance, shall ever be sought in marriage by me ... ” (281)

Lucy's self-control helps to construct her English identity, an important psychic project, but it is also damaging; this suggests a degree of resistance to the self-controlled masculine, middle class mores within which Brontë's conception of Englishness is generally confined. Lucy's repression manifests itself in various ways. It causes physical illness, a fever that compels her to visit a Catholic confessional. The nun, as Jacobus points out, is another example of “repression return[ing] vengefully” (42), always appearing at moments of “high emotional significance” (49). Moglen also shows how the nun “expresses Lucy's only nascent sexuality, anticipatory of rejection and sterility” (219-20). Lucy does seem unconsciously to acknowledge the unnaturalness of feminine sexlessness. She dislikes Graham's reaction to Ginevra's sexuality, saying:

The glow of his complexion, the expansion of his nostril, the bold curve which disdain gave his well-cut under lip, showed him in a new and striking phase. Yet the rare passion of the constitutionally suave and serene is not a pleasant spectacle; nor did I like the sort of vindictive thrill which passed through his strong young frame. (273)

It also pains her to be regarded as sexless, her “eyes fill[ing]” (396) with tears when Graham teases her on the basis of that assumption.

The foreign setting offers Lucy the possibility of exploring and coming to terms with her passion. As mentioned, M. Paul sees through her outward self-restraint. In particular, as his frequent resort to fire metaphors reveals (Surridge points out how nineteenth-century discourse “depicted unrestrained female sexuality as fire” (849)), he recognises her sexuality: “Petite chatte, doucerette, coquette! ... vous avez l’air bien triste, soumise, rêveuse, mais vous ne l’êtes pas; c’est moi qui vous le dis: Sauvage! la flamme à l’âme, l’éclair aux yeux!” (396). While Graham barely notices the pink dress, which, as Nestor points out (94), connotes sexuality, M. Paul’s horror at Lucy’s “scarlet gown” (418) exposes his immediate apprehension of it as a symbol of sexual potential.

With his outrageous hyperbole, M. Paul forces Lucy to confront and assert her right to passion. Again, Brontë authorises Lucy’s rejection of English repression by displacing repression in general onto Catholic women (Brontë draws here upon that “self-denying and self-sacrificing” (*Villette* 254) aspect of Catholicism that Max Weber notes “was felt to be something higher than the everyday morality which sufficed as a minimum” (120)). When Lucy tells M. Paul that by going out more often she has enjoyed a “little change” that has “not [come] before it ha[s] become necessary” (377), he responds by asking,

“How was it necessary? .... He would recommend me to look at the Catholic ‘religieuses,’ and study *their* lives. *They* asked no change.” (377)

As the “dead, pale,” “unwholesome” (252) women of ‘La vie d’une femme’ and Lucy’s own physical illness illustrate, such repression is unhealthy. The nun is of course also the embodiment of the sterility consequent on a puritanical and repressive religion. Incidentally, revealing the unnatural repression of Catholic women has the simultaneous effect of exposing the falseness of the English belief that female self-denial is a natural result of women’s passionlessness. This ideal is itself covertly displaced onto Catholicism in the novel: in another episode, Lucy defends the limitation of her capacity to deny her self by asserting that she did as much as she “*could* do” (255) when caring for Marie

Broc during the long vacation. She asks if “Monsieur could do it himself?” (255), to which he responds with typically English rhetoric: “Women who are worthy the name ought infinitely to surpass our coarse, fallible, self-indulgent sex, in the power to perform such duties” (255). M. Paul—and by extension those speaking through the dominant English discourse—further undermines such ideology with his own hypocrisy: in the midst of a harangue about the brazenness of the pink dress, Lucy notes how “M. Emanuel’s [own] taste in colours decidedly leaned to the brilliant” (419).

Authorised by her Englishness, Lucy is goaded into responding to M. Paul’s tirades with “just wrath”: “Oui; j’ai la flamme à l’âme, et je dois l’avoir!” (396). After her initial horror at the pink dress, she refuses to be bullied by M. Paul and even wears a new one to his fête. While M. Paul forces Lucy to acknowledge her sexuality, the foreign setting simultaneously offers her a rich environment for investigating its limits. Jacobus and Moglen both discuss the “potential for extension and self-exploration” (Moglen 217) that the Vashti offers; as noted, while Lucy is attracted to the free expression of passion that is so different from her own repression, she is also repelled by its excess: “It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral” (322). Shuttleworth shows how the excessiveness of the Vashti’s sexuality is “literally embodied ... in the outbreak of fire in the theatre” (‘Surveillance’ 149). Lucy also rejects the excessive sexuality of the Cleopatra, who is, as noted before, created to gratify male sexuality.<sup>14</sup> Surridge suggests, too, that Lucy’s refusal to wear men’s trousers in the vaudeville “may ... be understood as her refusal to perform as sex object” (6) (the wearing of trousers by women on the stage was considered to be sexually titillating in the nineteenth century).

At the end of the novel, Lucy’s love for M. Paul enables her fully to remove her mask of self-restraint. Madame Beck’s attempts to separate them “pierc[e]” her “deeper than [she can] endure”:

made now to feel what defied suppression, I cried—

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<sup>14</sup> I explore more fully the relationship between exoticism and sexuality in the chapter on *Under Two Flags*.

“My heart will break!”

What I felt seemed literal heart-break; but the seal of another fountain yielded under the strain: one breath from M. Paul, the whisper, “Trust me!” lifted a load, opened an outlet. With many a deep sob, with thrilling, with icy shiver, with strong trembling, and yet with relief—I wept. (600)

Just before this, Lucy exorcises the nun in a passionate frenzy stimulated by the heightened sensations of her opiate dream:

thoroughly lashed up by a new scourge, I defied spectra .... I ... rushed on the haunted couch ... as my instinct felt. I tore her up—the incubus! I held her on high—the goblin! I shook her loose—the mystery! And down she fell—down all round me—down in shreds and fragments—and I trode upon her. (587)

Shuttleworth points out the association of the word “incubus” with “sexuality” (‘Surveillance’ 157) in nineteenth century discourse; Lucy thus excises the sexual sterility represented by the nun.

If one is not to be trapped in the same ideology that governs dominant ideas about middle class femininity, one must concomitantly reconstruct masculinity, and during the course of the novel Lucy learns to do just that. Her love for Graham is instructive. From the first time that she meets him in Villette, Lucy emphasises his Englishness as she simultaneously obsesses about the perfection of his character. She suppresses the “fair, Celtic (not Saxon) character of his good looks” (19) that she noted in England, imagining his beauty as characteristically English: in addition to his stature, which looks “imposingly tall” next to the “Dutch-made women” (116), he has “English complexion, eyes, and form” (117). (Ginevra, who ridicules Graham’s “orange—red” (182) whiskers, betrays the selective nature of Lucy’s perception of his beauty.) What is important here is that Lucy’s construction of Graham’s Englishness relies upon strikingly conventional

ideas about gender. He is positioned in opposition to De Hamal, a “little dandy” (180) who is, according to Lucy,

pretty and smooth, and as trim as a doll: so nicely dressed, so nicely curled, so booted and gloved and cravated—he was charming indeed. I said so: “What a dear personage!” cried I, and commended Ginevra’s taste warmly; and asked her what she thought de Hamal might have done with the precious fragments of that heart she had broken—whether he kept them in a scent-vial, and conserved them in otto of roses? I observed, too, with a deep rapture of approbation, that the colonel’s hands were scarce larger than Miss Fanshawe’s own, and suggested that this circumstance might be convenient, as he could wear her gloves at a pinch. (181)

Here Lucy draws upon the English stereotype that holds that Frenchmen are overly concerned with appearance and social graces. De Hamal’s effeminacy makes him a ridiculous figure, as Lucy’s exclamation at his small hands, and her suggestion that he wear Ginevra’s gloves, makes clear. De Hamal’s effeminacy is contrasted to Graham’s manly appearance:

[Graham’s] uncovered head, his face and fine brow were most handsome and manly. *His* features were not delicate, nor slight like those of a woman, nor were they cold, frivolous, and feeble; though well cut, they were not so chiselled away, as to lose in power and significance what they gained in unmeaning symmetry. (184)

Masculinity here is associated with the strength and power that, in her construction of Englishness, Lucy tries so hard to de-gender. In the same spirit, Lucy admires Graham’s “manly self-control” (17), contrasting him to M. Paul:

I read in [Graham's demeanour] no common mastery of the passions, and a fund of deep and healthy strength .... Who could help liking him? *He* betrayed no weakness which harassed all your feelings with considerations as to how its faltering must be propped; from *him* broke no irritability which startled calm and quenched mirth; *his* lips let fall no caustic that burned to the bone; *his* eye shot no morose shafts that went cold and rusty and venomous through your heart: beside him was rest and refuge—around him, fostering sunshine. (279)

In keeping with Brontë's desire to blur demarcations of gender, learning to love M. Paul means in part relinquishing English prejudices about masculinity. This is not to say that he is effeminate—"with his close-shorn, black head, his broad, sallow brow, his thin cheek" and his "pungent and austere" (159) manner, he is quite the opposite—but he represents a different, more feminine masculinity. In contrast to self-controlled middle class English masculinity, he is passionate and "as capricious as women are said to be" (414). His emotionality gives him a compassion that surpasses that of rigid English masculinity; in his heart's "core [is] a place, tender beyond a man's tenderness; a place that humble[s] him to little children, that b[inds] him to girls and women: to whom, rebel as he w[ill], he [cannot] disown his affinity, nor quite deny that, on the whole, he [is] better with them than with his own sex" (425). Lucy is at first alienated by his passionate temperament. She considers him "a harsh apparition" (159) and a "dreadful" (303) and "despotic little man" (253). As she becomes reconciled to him, though, the repeated references to him as a "little man" ceases and the "low stature" ceases to "displeas[e]" (613) her. In place of her relentless admiration of Graham's 'manliness,' Lucy comes to admire M. Paul's child-like artlessness: "Who could help smiling at his wistfulness, his simplicity, his earnestness?" (399)

M. Paul's rearticulated masculinity is particularly significant, because he comes to function in the novel as a kind of honorary Englishman. There is some similarity between Protestantism and his austere Catholicism. Eagleton describes how "Paul unites a



‘sensible’ anti-radicalism with fiery reformist zeal, Protestant rationalism with Catholic spirit” (68). He also notes how “[b]oth Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, in fact combine rigorous self-discipline with imaginative intensity: Lucy speaks of Methodist and Papist as equally fantastical, and indeed the Romish tract which Paul gives her reminds her of Wesleyan pamphlets read in childhood” (Eagleton 69). Appropriating the positive, Protestant elements of Catholicism, M. Paul also resists its corruption:

All Rome could not put him into bigotry, nor the Propaganda itself make him a real Jesuit. He was born honest, and not false—artless, and not cunning—a freeman, and not a slave. (616)

More generally, Rajani Sudan points out how

Monsieur Paul’s Catholicism (what distinguishes him as most foreign) ... takes the form of a certain domestic piety that is expressed in his care of Justine Marie, Lucy, and even Madame Walravens. In this sense, his Catholicism may be read (and certainly is by Lucy) as a source of integrity, and his ‘otherness’ turns into a model of Englishness, defined by his ability to sustain a household. (146-7)

He especially despises dishonesty:

No calamity so accursed but M. Emanuel could pity and forgive, if it were acknowledged candidly; but where his questioning eyes met dishonest denial ... oh, then ... he could exultantly snatch the screen from poor shrinking wretches, passionately hurry them to the summit of the mount of exposure, and there show them all naked, all false—poor living lies—the spawn of that horrid Truth which cannot be looked on unveiled. (423)

M. Paul's frankness—he is “fierce and frank, dark and candid, testy and fearless” (387)—suggests English candour. These qualities, together with his chivalry, render him reminiscent of the English gentleman:

he was more like a knight of old, religious in his way, and of spotless fame. Innocent childhood, beautiful youth were safe at his side. He had vivid passions, keen feelings, but his pure honour and his artless piety were the strong charm that kept the lions couchant. (480).

As Marilyn Demarest Button points out, the otherness of characters like Aurora Leigh and Marian Halcombe gives them “[i]ndependence from the ideological and sexual constraints of English life” (xvii).<sup>15</sup> Authorised by his foreignness, which again testifies to the productivity of the foreign setting, M. Paul plays out the blurring of gender roles that Lucy's construction of Englishness attempts to create. Lucy's union with him is the novel's greatest movement towards a true dissolution of fixed gender roles. Its success must, however, be moderated by the threat to Lucy's independence that requires that he die at sea. The fact that M. Paul's Englishness must be performed in a foreign body is perhaps also a testimony to Brontë's pessimism about the possibility of Englishmen consenting to a renegotiation of middle class gender ideology.

As this suggests, the construction of Englishness in *Villette* is, ultimately, uncertainly placed between criticism and endorsement of masculine social power. For the most part, Brontë is unable either to envision Englishness outside the bounds of masculine discourse

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<sup>15</sup> Button is referring here to essays by Maureen Thum and Laurel Erickson in the volume she is introducing here. In the same volume, Frank P. Riga argues that in *Don Juan* Byron “rethinks male-female relationships according to a different reciprocal and nonhierarchical model.” Since he “tacitly recognizes that such a radical alteration in views of men and women is not possible in contemporary Europe” (8) this relationship must be acted out with an Oriental woman. Similarly, John Greenfield argues that in Shelley's *The Witch of Atlas*, “the witch herself, exotic but strangely desexed, represents the possibility of empowering a feminine consciousness” (18), while Oliver Lovesay argues that *Daniel Deronda* “figures an advance of the possibility of freedom from the sexual and ideological constraints of England in foreign lands” (124).

or entirely relinquish feminine domestic ideals. Furthermore, her conception of Englishness is, the text betrays, only possible outside England. More straightforwardly, *Villette* almost always unconsciously supports middle class social power. Nonetheless, Brontë's success in manipulating the literary form to reconstruct gender mores within the dominant discourse of Englishness cannot be erased. Thus far, she upholds the proposition that her location outside the dominant power structure as a woman writer facilitates resistance to the dominant discourse about Englishness, at least where masculine social power is concerned. It will remain for Ouida's *Under Two Flags* to suggest the possibility of resistance to middle class social power within that discourse.

## CHAPTER 2: *UNDER TWO FLAGS*

The very title captures the sense of duality that splits the construction of Englishness in *Under Two Flags*. This duality had its roots in Ouida's own contradictory identity, the most obvious element of which was her supposed rejection of England in favour of her father's native France. Citing an incident in which she denounced a proposed plaque to her in her childhood town of Bury St Edmunds with the words, "I identify with father's French race and blood," John Sutherland claims that "[i]t was to [her father's] flag she cleaved" (xiii). It is certainly true that from her childhood Ouida greatly admired the France of her adored father. Nonetheless, there are other aspects of her identity that are far more relevant to her construction of Englishness in *Under Two Flags*. That novel may lack the cruder bigotry of *Villette*, but its portrayal of Frenchness is actually quite conventional. There are numerous reasons for this, even putting aside the fact that the novel was written for an English audience and likely to have been influenced by existing literary conventions of Englishness. The comment that occasioned Sutherland's claim was made forty years after the publication of *Under Two Flags*, and at the time of writing the dominant cultural influence on Ouida would certainly have been English, given that, apart from a brief holiday to France when she was eleven, she had spent her entire life in England. Nor was her father a consistent presence: he finally disappeared in 1863 but was absent from the family for a substantial part of her life before that. Perhaps more significantly, in 1867 Ouida was at the height of her popularity in England and would not yet have been influenced by the bitterness that impelled her to go abroad in 1871, having become, according to Eileen Bigland, "the wrong sort of public figure" (73).<sup>1</sup> Her feelings would have been compounded by her disastrous return in 1886-7, when her romantic designs on Lord Lytton failed and financial difficulties left her stranded, and intensified by the poverty and loneliness that beset her at the end of her life.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Bigland, Ouida's "hatred against the British had its mainspring in their stolid refusal to admit her to any inner circle of friendship (in Ouida's case that meant entry into the great houses of the land), or to believe her fanciful legends of the de la Ramée family tree" (78).

There is another, more pertinent, reason why Ouida would have resented the plaque at Bury St Edmunds. Fed from her childhood, as Bigland explains, by her father's extravagant stories about "Paris *salons*, beautiful princesses, fascinating counts, gallant warriors, thrones well lost for love, and machinations of wicked courtiers" (17), she cultivated a "passion for titles" (56). She reputedly "strenuously denied" her middle class identity "to the day of her death" (27), manufacturing an elaborate fiction about being "the last descendant of a noble French family who had suffered untold sorrows through their loyalty to their king" (54); unsurprisingly, she disliked reference to her childhood years.<sup>2</sup> The conflict between Ouida's middle class and aristocratic identities is reproduced in her career as a writer, which was motivated by the desire "not only ... to make her living by writing but to support her mother and grandmother in luxury as well" (Bigland 27). Her ability to extract money from her publishers was legendary. One might thus interpret her extravagant expenditure and disregard for financial management partly as an attempt to obscure her troubling engagement with the bourgeois world.<sup>3</sup> As she wrote in a letter to one of her publishers about her collection of stories *Pipistrello*:

If I did not love *Art* too much ever to sacrifice it for money, I could easily have amplified it ... a little and passed it off on you as a 3 vol. novel. But with me you may be sure that the artistic feeling always outweighs all others. (Cited in Bigland 153)

Her romantic style, which was, as Talia Schaffer argues, a deliberate aesthetic ploy,<sup>4</sup> is further evidence of her desire to veil her participation in capitalist enterprise with an ostensible artistic project.

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<sup>2</sup> Bigland describes an incident during Ouida's stay with the Lyttons in England, in which the family's governess, who was also from Bury St. Edmunds, asked her if she remembered her from her childhood. "Livid with rage," Ouida is reputed to have "snapped that she emphatically did *not*" (190).

<sup>3</sup> Among other things, Bigland recounts how Ouida reputedly responded to her friend Lady Windsor's suggestion that she should "curtail her expenses" with the retort, "It is the privilege of wealth to give to genius" (207).

<sup>4</sup> Schaffer goes so far as to argue that Ouida "standardized the genre of the aesthetic novel," "populariz[ing] the figure of the languid male dandy connoisseur, and ... set[ting] new standards for the passionate descriptions of *objets d'art*" as well as "pioneer[ing] a new form of discourse that eluded the demands of realism" with "her 'facile aphorisms,' her witty epigrams" (124).

Ouida's perspective on gender is also contradictory. As Pamela Gilbert explains, her "antifeminism was vocal" ('New Woman' 170). She helped coin the term "New Woman" in an article published in *The North American Review* that attacked an earlier feminist article by Sarah Grand.<sup>5</sup> As the very few modern scholars who have surveyed her work have realised, however, it is mistaken simply to dismiss her as straightforwardly complicit in patriarchal ideology.<sup>6</sup> Her dislike of women, and her open preference for masculine company and culture—she famously declared, "Je n'écris pas pour les femmes. J'écris pour les militaires"<sup>7</sup>—suggests that she personally felt restricted by the dominant feminine culture. Her failure to be recognised as a serious writer would, especially, have given her good reason to feel marginalised as a woman.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Ellen Jordan, 'The Christening of the New Woman: May 1894.'

<sup>6</sup> See Pamela Gilbert, 'Ouida and the New Woman,' esp. pp170-1 and Chapter 5 of *Disease, Desire and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*; Natalie Schroeder, 'Feminine Sensationalism, Eroticism, and Self-Assertion: M.E. Braddon and Ouida,' esp. p90; Carol Poster, 'Oxidization is a Feminist Issue: Acidity, Canonicity and Popular Victorian Female Authors,' pp300-1 and Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England*, esp. p122.

<sup>7</sup> Ouida's dislike of women is stressed by both Monica Stirling and Eileen Bigland, her most modern biographers. According to Stirling, "[i]n London she had neither made, nor tried to make, friends with women other than Richard Burton's wife, Isabel, whose passions and eccentricities matched her own in intensity if not in kind" (87), while Bigland says "Ouida rarely approved of her own sex" (42). William Tinsley, the publisher of her first novel, described how she "obtain[ed] such a masculine grasp of character" (cited in Stirling 58) by

invit[ing] young officers of the Guards, and young gentlemen of a sporting tendency, to dine with her and her mother. After dinner, when they lighted up their weeds and pipes, she would say, 'Now gentlemen, suppose my mother and myself are out of the room. Seat yourselves; smoke and drink as if you were at the club; talk as if you were in the smoking-room there; never think about us. (Cited in Stirling 57-8)

<sup>8</sup> To illustrate, Schaffer argues that Ouida's extravagant dress and roomfuls of flowers are symptomatic of the same self-consciously aesthetic spirit that inspired the Aesthetic Dress Reform, of which Oscar Wilde is the most familiar advocate. Wilde's extravagant behaviour has been validated by his aesthetic programme in a way that Ouida's has not (for her, it has been a source of constant ridicule), suggesting that her failure to be recognised as a serious artist, or a "female aesthete" to use Schaffer's term, partly stems from her sex. Ouida certainly sincerely believed in her artistic credibility, informing one of her publishers in a letter for which she has been much mocked since that:

English literature is very sorry stuff nowadays. You must make much of ME, for now George Elliott is gone there is no one else who can write English. (Cited in Bigland 156)

Ouida's identity is mirrored by the profoundly contradictory construction of Englishness in *Under Two Flags*. Although, as I will show, she enthusiastically celebrates aristocratic superiority, it is a telling testimony to the strength of the dominant middle class discourse that for the most part unconsciously she draws upon middle class ideals—especially self-control—in order to construct Cecil's Englishness. Not only this, but, like Lucy, who must leave England in order to construct an English identity, Cecil must leave the aristocratic world, and England, before he can embody Englishness. In the first part of the novel, he is decidedly frenchified, indulging in "Delphine Demirep's last novel, a bath well dashed with eau-de-cologne, and some glasses of anisette" (11). Like the stereotypical Frenchman, his accomplishments are measured solely in terms of "fashion, flirting, waltzing, and general social distinction; in no other sense" (13). In place of English profundity of feeling, he is obsessed with trivial matters of personal appearance: the first that the reader knows of him is that he is "uncommon particular" about the colour of his tops and "if his leathers ain't as white as snow he'll never touch 'em" (3). According to one of his mistresses, he "care[s] for nothing longer than a fortnight, unless it were his horse, Forest King" (7).

Cecil's aristocratic insouciance and laconic habits exist as a perversion of English emotional reserve and taciturnity. They are not caused by a powerful self-discipline, but by superficiality of feeling, laziness and obsession with social form. Cecil is "never excited, never disappointed, never exhilarated, never disturbed, and also of course never by any chance embarrassed" because that is what "the canons of his Order" (13) dictate. His love affairs especially encapsulate his superficial, fashionable emotions. At one point he wonders if the Lady Guenevere and he "really love" each other, and concludes:

"I suppose we do ... at least, quite as much as is ever worth while. Passions don't do for the drawing-room, as somebody says in 'Coningsby'; besides—I would not feel a strong emotion for the universe. Bad style always, and more detrimental to 'condition,' as Tom would say, than three bottles of brandy!" (23)

As the narrator says of their affair, it is a “light, surface, fashionable, philosophic form of a passion .... Cecil c[an], when needed, do the Musset and Meredith style of thing to perfection, but on the whole he prefer[s] love à la mode; it is so much easier and less exhausting to tell your mistress of a ringing run, or a close finish, than to turn perpetual periods on the lustre of her eyes, and the eternity of your devotion” (51).

The laziness that contributes to Cecil’s aristocratic indolence—a quality that is obviously antithetical to middle class self-discipline—is stressed in this part of the novel. He is barely capable of “put[ting] his tall lithe limbs indolently off his sofa” (6), and while he admires his factotum Rake for defending his dog after it is threatened with hanging, he is unsure if, faced with the same situation, he “could have got up the pace for so much exertion” (58). Speech in particular takes a great deal of effort that a weary aristocrat cannot spare. Cecil first appears in the novel “[m]urmuring [a] multiplicity of directions ... in the softest and sleepest of tones” (5) (he often ‘murmurs’ in the first part of the novel), and when his father castigates him for his profligacy, he responds with his “accustomed gentle murmur” that “[t]his sort of talk is very exhausting, very bad style” (46).

Unlike *Villette*, where middle class discourse about Englishness provided Brontë with the opportunity to renegotiate gender roles, Ouida’s use of the same ideology, at least so far as male English identity is concerned, remains complicit with masculine social power. By drawing upon qualities such as superficial emotion and obsession with social form to delineate Cecil’s corrupt aristocratic nature, the novel unconsciously privileges the dominant middle class conception of masculinity. This is accentuated by its persistent reference to the “weak and feminine nature” (418) of Cecil’s brother Berkeley. The narrator also stresses Cecil’s femininity in the first part of the novel. He is “inconceivably effeminate in every one of his habits” (61) and his face “has as much delicacy and brilliancy as a woman’s,” with features that are “exceedingly fair—fair as the fairest girl’s” (4); it earns him the nickname “Beauty.” Tellingly, though he is “the most perfect of flirts,” he will “never be ‘serious,’ and [has] nothing to be serious with, on which understanding he [is] allowed by [women] to have the run of their boudoirs and drawing-



rooms much as if he were a little lion-dog; they counted him quite 'safe,' he made love to the married women to be sure, but he was quite certain not to run away with the marriageable daughters" (13). Devoid of threatening masculine sexuality, Cecil becomes an honorary woman.

This early part of the novel draws upon middle class ideas of aristocratic degeneracy. The "parasite of extravagance" that is "constantly sapping, unseen, the gallant old Norman-planted oak of the family-tree" (42) is visible in the "supple, childish, petulant, cowardly nature" (82) of the youngest Royallieu, Berkeley, for the sake of whose dishonesty Cecil is exiled to Algeria:

Little Berke's pretty face was very flushed; his lips were set tight, his eyes were glittering; the boy had the gambler's passion of the Royallieu blood in its hottest intensity. He was playing with a terrible eagerness that went to Bertie's heart with the same sort of pang of remorse with which he had looked on him when he had been thrown like dead on his bed at home. (75)

There is a suggestion of savagery amongst the novel's degenerate aristocrats. Savagery is of course epitomised by the wild animal that unconsciously acts on its impulses, rendering civilisation a condition of self-control. Ouida herself neatly illustrates this idea:

The school in which [the vivandière Cigarette] had been reared had been one to foster all those barbaric impulses, to leave in their inborn uncontrolled force all those native desires which the human shares with the animal nature. There had been no more to teach her that these were criminal or forbidden than there is to teach the young tigress that it is cruel to tear the antelope for food. What Cigarette was, that nature had made her; she was no more trained to self-control, or to the knowledge of good, than is the tiger's cub as it wantons in its play under the great broad tropic leaves. (462)

Lacking middle class self-control, the aristocrats in *Under Two Flags* are susceptible to savage impulses. In the hunt in the first part of the novel, the Zu-Zu, who is not an aristocrat but is fully acclimatised to its society, cries that it “[b]eats cock-fighting!” (64), while the Lady Guenevere calls out, “A guinea to a shilling that we kill [the fox]!” (66). Later, Cecil recalls how he has seen “many a great lady look on and laugh her soft cruel laughter while the pheasants were falling by hundreds, or the stags being torn by hounds” (273). Cecil’s father also possesses a violent uncontrolled temper: he “adored” his wife “with a fierce and jealous passion that her indifference only inflamed” (43), but hates Cecil with “a cruel and savage detestation” (44). As the narrator says, he is subject to an “unprovoked and reasonless passion which he vent[s] on every one, but one none so much as the son he hate[s]” (45).

Although Cecil himself is never linked with savagery (he is presumably one of those who “hunt[s] to ride” rather than “ride[s] to hunt” (61)), there is, nonetheless, as Pamela Gilbert points out, “a suggestion in his languidness and his love of French novels and cologne of degeneracy” (‘New Woman’ 177). Were he to remain in this environment, there is no doubt, as the narrator says, that “he would have lounged listlessly through fashionable seasons, and, in an atmosphere that encouraged his profound negligence of everything and his natural nil-admirari listlessness ... glided from refinement to effeminacy, and from lazy grace to blasé inertia” (235). Instead, persecution rouses his true English character by injecting him with a good dose of middle class masculinity. When he is threatened with the indignity of handcuffs, he casts off his aristocratic laziness and draws on “the science of the Eton Playing Fields of his boyhood” (137) to fight off the four men who try to arrest him in Baden and then out-run and out-jump the crowd that has gathered to pursue him. He escapes his prosecutors, and the corrupting influence of the aristocratic world, by joining the French army in Algeria, where “steel and strength” are given “to the indolence and languor of his nature” (235). He proves himself on the battlefield as “a brilliant French soldier” (181) who thinks nothing of taking on “[s]ix Arabs to his own sword” (176). Ouida may frown upon French colonialism, but Cecil’s physical prowess thinly veils the English masculine fantasy of empire building that informed the dominant discourse of Englishness.

Above all, life in the army teaches Cecil the masculine self-control that is central to middle class Englishness. The narrator makes it clear that this is a distinct process:

The first years were ... years of intense misery to him. Misery, when all the blood glowed in him under some petty tyrant's jibe, and he had to stand immovable, holding his peace. Misery, when the hunger and thirst of long marches tortured him, and his soul sickened at the half-raw offal, and the water thick with dust, and stained with blood, which the men round him seized so ravenously. Misery, when the dreary dawn broke, only to usher in a day of mechanical manœuvres, of petty tyrannies, of barren burdensome hours in the exercise-ground, of petty tyrannies, of barren burdensome hours in the exercise ground, of convoy duty in the burning sun-glare, and under the heat of harness. (232-3)

Where once he was “weak as water” (391), Cecil comes to “know ... the hunger of famine ... the torment of fever ... the agony of forbidden pride ... the wild delight of combat” (235). He learns “what it [is] to long madly for a stoup of water; to lie raving, yet conscious, under the throes of gunshot wounds; to be forced to bear impassively words, for a tithe of which he could have struck across the mouth the chief who spoke them” (235-6) and becomes “well used to pain, well used to self-control, well used to self-restraint” (390). He must also grapple daily against the “terrible temptation” (248) of retaliating to persecution at the hands of the Marquis de Châteauroy, a trial that the other soldiers can tell makes him “suffe[r] ... as they never suffered themselves” but which “he b[ears] ... with a self-control and patience they ha[ve] never attained” (249).

The hardships of Africa enable Cecil to feel the genuine emotion that is essential for true middle class masculine English self-control. He “suffer[s], brave[s], resent[s], f[i]ght[s], love[s], hate[s], endure[s], and even enjoy[s] ... in Africa, with a force and a vividness that he had never dreamed possible in his calm, passionless, insouciant world of other days” (235). In place of the frivolous love affairs of his old world he comes “to love the dark Arab eyes, that smil[e] on him in his exile, as he ha[s] never loved those of another

woman, and to suffer when the death-film gather[s] over them, as he ha[s] never thought it in him to suffer for any death or any life” (236). He learns what it is like “to feel every nerve thrill, and every vein glow, as with fierce, exultant joy, as the musketry peal[s] above the plains, and his horse presse[s] down on to the very mouths of rifles” (236). While these “desert passions,” the narrator informs us, “outwardly ... le[ave] him much the same in character, they chang[e] him vitally .... develop[ing] him into a magnificent soldier” (236).

Cecil’s Englishness is especially signified by his emotional restraint. Throughout his time in Algeria, the massive effort he must exert to remain outwardly passive is often denoted by a minute betrayal of emotion. In one episode, he endures a rebuke from Châteauroy with almost perfect “self-restraint”: “a very keen observer might have seen that a faint flush rose over the sun-tan of his face, and that his teeth clenched under his beard, but he let no other sign escape him” (245). Similarly, when, in the midst of a personal crisis about his fate in Algeria, he suddenly encounters Berkeley, his face “flushe[s], and move[s], and alter[s] with ... emotion” and “[f]or a moment” he stands “motionless and speechless, then, with a marvellous self-command and self-restraint ... br[ings] his hand to his brow in military salute” and “passe[s] with the impassiveness of a soldier who pass[es] a gentleman” (416). Cecil’s emotional self-control is explicitly linked to his English identity, as the narrator’s account of his relationship with the poet-soldier Léon Ramon reveals: “[t]he gentle impassiveness of the Englishman had been like rest to the ardent impetuosity of the French soldier” (313). The Englishness of Cecil’s self-control is also emphasised by his alignment with the Arabs (even if, as will be seen, it is complicated by the Arabs’ innate savagery):

[Cecil] liked the Arabs and they liked him; a grave courtesy, a preference for the fewest words and least demonstration possible, a marked opinion that silence was golden, and that speech was at best only silver-washed metal, an instinctive dread of all discovery of emotion, and a limitless power of resisting and suppressing suffering, were qualities the nomads of the desert and the *lion* of the Chasseurs

d'Afrique had in common; as they had in unison a wild passion for war, a dauntless zest in danger, and a love for the hottest heat of fiercest battle. (213)<sup>9</sup>

As Mark Girouard points out, it was common for Victorian gentlemen to be “drawn to Arab countries” (271); Philip Mason also outlines the affinity between the English gentleman and “two other ideal figures, the Rajput noble and the Muslim” (150), noting that their similarity was encapsulated by the fact that “Rajput, Arab and Englishman alike admired the gentleman who did not reveal his emotions” (151).

As the above quotation suggests, Cecil's taciturnity is another important aspect of his Englishness. In contrast to the laconic habits of his aristocratic days, the self-control that is necessary to maintain his verbal restraint, a necessary strategy if he is to keep his identity secret, is emphasised throughout the novel. In one episode, for example, the Princess Venetia “fancie[s] there [is] a slight abruptness in [Cecil's] reply, as though he were about to add some other name, and checked himself” (290). Significantly, the power of Cecil's temptation at the end of the novel is dramatically illustrated as a struggle against the need to speak where his “teeth clen[ch] on his tongue till the blood flow[s]” (481). Only the stupefaction of fever induces him to betray in “incoherent words of French and English strangely mingled” (369) the story of “his past, and the beauty of the woman who ha[s] brought all the memories of that past back on him” (370).

Ironically, Cecil's very silence discloses his nationality. When the French soldiers attempt to assert proof of his English identity, his verbal restraint is repeatedly emphasised:

“Because he is silent.” ....

“Because he is so quiet, and blazes like the devil underneath.” (178)

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<sup>9</sup> The “dread” that Cecil and the Arabs feel at their emotion being “discover[ed]” suggests in particular that their emotional reserve is not natural, but actively achieved and capable of failure. This sense is invoked

A few lines later, the French soldier Tata exclaims, “Chut! Thou mayst make a lion tame, a vulture leave blood, a drum beat its own rataplan, a dead man fire a *clarinette à six pieds*; but thou wilt never make an Englishman speak when he is bent to be silent” (178). Cecil’s silence contrasts to the volubility of the French:

After the noise, the mirth, the riotous songs, and the gay elastic good-humour of his French comrades, the silence and the calm of the Emir’s ‘house of hair’ were welcome to him. He never spoke much himself ... the only charge that his Chambrée ever brought against him. That a man could be so brief in words, while yet so soft in manner, seemed a thing out of all nature to the vivacious Frenchmen .... (214)

The self-controlled Englishness that invokes middle class masculinity also manifests itself in Cecil’s resistance to savagery. Although the French share whiteness with the English, it is far less stable, a weakness that transcends social class. Their innate potential for savagery is partially produced by the excessive passion caused by their lack of self-control—the kidnapping of the Djelma, for example, is spurred by the soldiers’ “heated fancies” (207). Cigarette, in particular, with her “warm little Gallic heart” (385), is the embodiment of French expressiveness:

“Ah!” she said, quickly and sharply, with a deep-drawn breath. The single ejaculation was at once a menace, a tenderness, a whirlwind of rage, a volume of disdain, a world of pity. It was intensely French, and the whole nature of Cigarette was in it. (262)

Cigarette possesses “the fierce and intolerant heat of the passionate and scarce-conscious jealousy of an utterly untamed nature, and of Gallic blood, quick and hot as the steaming

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again when Ben Arsli, the Arab shopkeeper, is described being “more moved than his Moslem dignity would show” (291); the word “would” implies conscious effort.

springs of the Geyser” (308). A similar connection between passion and savagery is made in this passage:

[Cigarette] was passionate, she was vain, she was wayward, she was fierce as a little velvet leopard ... and, for the moment, she had an instinct, fiery, ruthless, and full of hate, to draw the pistol out of her belt, and teach him with a shot, crash through heart or brain, that girls who were ‘unsexed’ could keep enough of the woman in them not to be neglected with impunity. (254)

Africa especially fosters savagery, which is exemplified by the natives of Algeria, the Arabs. The Arabs’ external self-control thinly masks an innate savagery ready to rise to the surface at any moment, “the fiery gloom of [their] burning eyes bel[ying]” their “Moslem patience” (215). “[O]nce back in the desert,” the Spahi Ben Arslan is “all an Arab ... with a blow of a scabbard his only payment for forage, and a thrust of his sabre his only apology to husbands” (194). In one telling episode, Cecil confronts a group of Arabs who are “senseless with the fury which seems to possess every Arab once started in a race neck to neck” (271). With “the blood-thirst upon them” they “dar[t] headlong all abreast down out of the town overriding all that c[o]me in their way, and lashing their poor beasts with their sabres till the horses’ flanks ran with blood” (271) (Ouida’s fanaticism about animals, which induced her to keep large numbers of dogs, all fed on extravagant diets of “soup, game, lobster patties, timbale of beef, sweet cakes [and] *petits-fours*” (Bigland 102), makes the Arabs’ cruelty to their horses particularly resonant). Even the Arab chief Ilderim, for all his nobility, is, “of course,” the narrator

avers, “but a nomad, a barbarian, a robber ... a ruler of robbers” and “a half-savage Ishmaelite, or he would long have abandoned” (218) his tribe.<sup>10</sup>

The environment of war and Africa fully awakens the French savagery that waits beneath the surface. As the Seraph describes, Cigarette, who has “the fierceness of Africa” (203), aptly illustrates its de-civilising effect:

“Ah, you do not know what half-French, half-African natures are. She would die for him just now very likely; but if he ever forsake her, she will be quite as likely to run her dirk through him.” (455)

Even the bodies of the French are rendered Arab-like: Châteauroy’s “frame [is] like an Arab’s, and knit into Arab endurance” (208), and he has a “black African-burnt visage” (189), while the Zouave En-ta-maboull, who is compared to “an Abruzzi brigand,” is “aquiline-nosed, eagle-eyed, [and] black-skinned as an African” (195). Cigarette herself has “jetty” (179) curls and skin burnt brown by the sun.

French savagery is manifested in brutality towards the inhabitants of Algeria. In one episode, the Vicomte de Chanrellon casually describes hunting Arabs as for sport:

“We were hunting Arabs, of course, pot-shooting rather ... Rire-pour-tout grew sick of it. ‘This won’t do,’ he said; ‘here’s two weeks gone by, and I haven’t shot anything but kites and jackals. I shall get my hand out.’ For Rire-pour-tout, as the army knows ... generally potted his man every day, and he missed it terribly .... ” (162)

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<sup>10</sup> The sense of Arab savagery is compounded by their repeated alignment with animals of prey: for example, they are predators who advance in a “war-cloud” with “a whirr like the noise of an eagle’s wings,



The French also enjoy looting the native population, as Tata illustrates when he gleefully recounts frightening a poor, simple peasant into giving up his geese (176-7). French savagery in Algeria also has another manifestation, arguably worse than the brutality of the common soldiers. Ilderim claims (somewhat unconvincingly, it must be admitted—Ouida is faced with the moral paradox of simultaneously condemning the French presence in Algeria and keeping Cecil's integrity intact while he serves in that very army) that Cecil's "comrades are gallant men; they are *lascars kébirs*, and fearless foes, against such my voice is never lifted" (215). He despises instead the French bourgeois "locust-swarms that devour the land ... the money-eaters, the petty despots, the bribe-takers, the men who wring gold out of infamy, who traffic in tyrannies, who plunder under official seals, who curse Algiers with avarice, with fraud, with routine, with the hell-spawn of civilization" (215). (The irony of the French goal of "civilization" here is obvious.)

In contrast, not only does Cecil retain his civility in Algeria, but the "desert passions" make him "a magnificent soldier" (236). He retains his fair English colouring: he is "bronzed, but scarcely look[s] so after the red, brown, and black of the Zouaves and the Turco, for his skin [is] naturally very fair," and his hands are "very white, despite the sun of Algiers, and the labours that fall to a private of Chasseurs" (181). Most significantly, Cecil preserves intact his moral integrity, resisting the French degeneration into violence. The "one reproach, that ma[kes] his fellow-lascars impatient and suspicious of him" (197) is that he "*never thieves from the Arabs!*" (189). Likewise, only Cecil will have no part of the kidnapping of Djelma, informing Châteauroy that "I think that those who make war on women are no longer fit to fight with men" (209). The active self-control against the desert conditions that seek to render him savage is implicit throughout the text, as when the narrator states that "the fattest pullet of the poorest Bedouin [is] as sacred to him as the banquet of his own Chef d-Escadron, let him be ever so famished after the longest day's march" (197).

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and a swoop like an eagle's seizure" (350) and their screams are "fierce as the yelling of starving wolves around a frozen corpse" (513).

In short, Cecil is transformed into a middle class English gentleman, his emotional restraint and taciturnity linking with other recognisable gentlemanly characteristics. He is kind to all, no matter how weak or vulnerable. In one episode, he rescues a kid that has fallen into a stream, because it is “not in him willingly to let any living thing suffer, and he [is] always gentle to all animals” (425-6). He is especially courteous to women, and although he sees in Cigarette little more than a coarse army girl, he greets her with a bow, “raising his cap with a grave courteous obeisance,” and the words “Ah, ma belle .... You do me much honour” (182). He has a strong sense of honour (the plot is built around him taking the blame for a crime of which he is innocent rather than jeopardise a woman’s reputation), which, as Girouard has shown, was also an essential gentlemanly trait. Another lesser known gentlemanly characteristic was submission to circumstances beyond control; John Henry Newman sums matters up when he states that the true gentleman is “patient, forbearing, and resigned, on philosophical principles; he submits to pain, because it is inevitable, to bereavement, because it is irreparable, and to death, because it is his destiny” (159). Thus when “[c]ourtesy [is] forbidden [Cecil] as insult from a Corporal to a nobly born beauty,” he “no more quarrel[s] with the decree than with other inevitable consequences, inevitable degradations, that followed on his entrance as a private under the French flag” (264). Cecil also exhibits gentlemanly anti-intellectualism:

He was no moralist and no philosopher, though he practised, without ever knowing it, a philosophy of the highest and simplest kind with every day that found him in the ranks of the Algerian army .... he was much more of a soldier than a thinker at any time, and, instead of following out the problem of the world’s uses of its two raw materials, time and men, he found a subject more congenial in the discussion of stable science with the Emir. (217)

Above all, he is honest. The other soldiers know that “they should cut [his] heart out rather than make [him] tell a lie” (252), and when he tells Berkeley that he is “content” to be a soldier in Algeria, “it [is] the only lie that ha[s] ever passed his lips” (422).

Ouida's complicity with middle class social power always competes with her open desire to promote aristocratic superiority. Thus at the same time that Englishness in *Under Two Flags* advances the interests of the middle classes, it is contradictorily signified by the very act of observing class boundaries within a paternalistic relationship (paternalism also of course reinforces masculine power). Cecil and Rake are situated in opposition to Cigarette, the embodiment of French republicanism and an "inborn democrat" (449) who "loaded the carbines behind the barricade in an émeute in Paris before she was ten years old" (261) and "kn[ows] of no hymn but the *Marseillaise*" (303). "[A] child of the People" (467), she boasts of her hatred for the aristocracy. In contrast, Rake sedulously observes the difference in rank between himself and his master, loving him with "such a wild, chivalric, romantic fidelity as the Cavaliers or the Gentlemen of the North bore to their Stuart idols" (342) (the specifically nationalistic terms here are obvious). When Cecil chides Rake for removing his armour "with as reverential a service as though he were a Lord of the Bedchamber serving a Louis Quatorze" because they "are comrades and equals now," Rake retorts:

"I've told you a thousand times, sir, that we aren't, and never will be, and don't oughtn't to be .... A gentleman's a gentleman, let alone what straits he fall into."  
(219)

Rake wilfully avoids promotion in the French army through calculated acts of misbehaviour because it would be

"A pretty thing, surely! Me a officer, and you never a one—me a commandin' of you, and you a salutin' of me! By the Lord, sir! we might as well see the camp scullions a ridin' in state, and the Marshal a scouring out the soup-pots!" (341)

He recognises that those of noble birth are naturally fitted for command, noting that "[a]s a private ... I'm happy and I'm *safe*; as an officer, I should be kicking over the traces, and blunderin' everlastingly" (342).

For all that Cecil pleads with Rake to treat him as an equal, his regard for the Princess Venetia exposes his own complicity with demarcations of rank. His lack of sympathy for Cigarette's perspective is plain when he responds to her resentment of Venetia's patronage with "a certain annoyance" (307). (When she repeats her diatribe to Venetia's brother, the Seraph, that "Englishman" too "look[s] at her with astonishment ... mingled with a vivid sense of intense annoyance and irritated pride, that the name he cherished closest should be thus brought in, at a camp dinner, on the lips of a vivandière and in connection with a trooper of Chasseurs" (403).) Cecil's attraction to the Princess Venetia actually seems to be entirely attributable to the fact that she represents a particular social class—indeed, in the novel as a whole she functions less as an individual than an embodiment of nobility—an impression that is of course strengthened by her own rigorous attention to rank. When Cecil first meets Venetia, he "forg[ets] who and where he now [is]" and "bow[s] as in other days he had used to bow in the circle of St James's" (246), contrasting her with the "fille[s] de joie" and "cantinière[s]" who constitute Algerian womanhood. Thereafter, whenever he recalls her he sees not an individual but "the memories of other worlds" in her "deep imperial eyes" (336). As Léon Ramon says, "Your heart is with you old Order. You are '*aristocrat au bout des ongles*'" (310).

Ouida's attitude towards republicanism was characteristically English. In 1883 she claimed Gambetti's death was "a calamity" for France because "I fear the Republicans will fly to some more violent communist as a leader, and then the mad destroying fires may spread beyond French frontiers" (cited in Bigland 168), and later that year she wrote that "Bismarck is quite right in thinking that while [France] is Republican she will be always miserably disunited and weak" (cited in Bigland 169). This is not to say that she had no sympathy for the working classes (later in life she would passionately take up the cause of the Italian peasants). In *Under Two Flags*, Ouida clearly admires the republican concern for the plight of the common people that induces "great tears [to] cours[e] down [soldiers'] brown scarred cheeks" as they recall how Cigarette's "touch would fall as softly as a snowflake on their heated foreheads" (299). She also criticises the English army for its failure to apprehend the individuality of its working class recruits. While, as

Rake details, France acknowledges that working class men have “got good stuff in ‘em, though too much of the curb riles ‘em,” those in command of the English army “don’t ever remember that” such behaviour “may be only just along of his breedin,’ and that he may make a very good hound” so long as they do not “try to make a steady line-hunter of him straight agin his nature” (340). A former member of the English Guards, Cecil learns to appreciate men of lower rank, admitting to Rake that “I knew nothing of my men when ... I was in England; we none of us did; but I can very well believe what you say” (222).

Such concern for the working classes is not in the context of giving them any meaningful social power; the proper relationship between the aristocracy and the working classes is always paternalistic. In illustration of the contradictory dynamics that inform the construction of Englishness in *Under Two Flags*, Cigarette’s French politics are shown to be irrational and even savage, implicitly rendering the English, in their observance of the paternalistic relationship, rational and civilised—qualities that, as has been seen, elsewhere in the text suggest middle class masculinity. Ouida condemns Cigarette’s rash “hatred of a class” (467), emphasising the ignorance that informs her worldview. “Like many another,” the narrator says when detailing Cigarette’s hatred of Venetia, “[she] underrated what she had no knowledge of, and depreciated an antagonist the measure of whose fence she had no power to gauge” (263). Cigarette’s general ignorance is emphasised throughout the text: her knowledge of Englishmen is “derived from a profound study of various vaudevilles” (179), and when she deems that “Harpagon was an angel” compared to a Jewish shopkeeper, the narrator qualifies this with the remark that “[s]he knew Harpagon because some of her Roumis chattered bits of Molière” (238). The fallacy of her republican beliefs is finally revealed to her near the end of the novel, when, intending to “do the best that could be done to outrage, to scourge, to challenge, to deride her with all the insolent artillery of camp ribaldry, and show her how a child of the people c[an] laugh at her rank, and affront her purity, and scorn her power” (461), she visits Venetia’s quarters. Venetia swiftly disarms her republican arguments:

Cigarette ... was silenced; her face burned .... She had come prepared to upbraid and to outrage this patrician with every jibe and grossness camp usage could

supply her with, and—she stood dumb before her! She could only feel an all-absorbing sense of being ridiculous, and contemptible, and puerile in her sight. (465-6)

More sinisterly, Cigarette's hatred of the aristocracy, and by extension the spirit of republican France, stems from her innate "savage instinct" (462). This spirit is encapsulated by "the fisher-girl of the Cannébière" (461) who dragged the head of an aristocratic woman guillotined during the Terror "through dust, and mire, and gore, and over the rough stones of the town, and through the shouting crowds of the multitudes" before "toss[ing] it out on to the sea, laughing still as the waves flung it out from billow to billow" (462). Cigarette is aligned with this "terrible vengeance under the hot southern sun, beside the ruthless southern seas" (477): "I could do it—I could do it," she thought, with the savage instinct of her many-sided nature dominant, leaving uppermost only ... the same ferocity as had moved the southern woman to wreak her hatred on the senseless head of her rival" (462).

Englishness in *Under Two Flags* promotes aristocratic social power in another way. The text plays out a kind of racial fantasy that positions the elite aristocrats embodied by Cecil and the Venetia as the best and purest of the English race.<sup>11</sup> Venetia is "of a great Line that th[inks] few royal branches on equality with it; and she cherish[es] as things of strictest creed and fact the legends that gave to her race, with its amber hair and its eyes of sapphire blue, the blood of King Arthur in their veins" (295). King Arthur of course occupies a mythical place in the English imagination as the embodiment of ideal, Saxon

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<sup>11</sup> The word "race" here demands some clarification. Although, as L. P. Curtis points out, during the nineteenth century "race" was used in "a more neutral and traditional sense to designate a particular class or category such as a 'race of kings' or a 'race of yeomen'" (19), after the 1830s the "word was ... used in an ever more biological and physiological sense" to "connot[e] the more or less lasting divisions of mankind into groups of men and women who could claim descent from a common ancestor and who therefore shared the same blood and traits associated with that physiological heritage" (20). While this meaning is obviously possible at the time that *Under Two Flags* was written, one should, however, be wary of placing too much emphasis on this scientific idea of race in mid-Victorian discourse about Englishness. It was not

Englishness: in Inga Bryden's words, "the figure of Arthur ... came to typify, indeed embody, the components of manliness, honour, heroic leadership and liberty which comprised the Teutonic notion of Englishness" (141). Although Arthur was really a Celtic king who defeated the Saxons, during the nineteenth century he metamorphosed in the popular imagination into a blond-haired, blue-eyed Saxon, a process that was aided by works of fiction like Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859).<sup>12</sup>

Cecil, on the other hand, is Norman, and he "b[ears] the name and the title of his house as surely as any ha[s] ever borne it since the first of the Norman owners of Royallieu ... followed the Bastard's banner" (322). As William Thackeray ironically suggests in *The Book of Snobs* (1848), which describes an "old aristocrat, swelling with pride of race, the descendant of illustrious Norman robbers, whose blood has been pure for centuries, and who looks down upon common Englishmen as a freeborn American does on a nigger" (39), Norman ancestry was popularly associated with the English nobility in the nineteenth century. This dual sense of Englishness and nobility is captured by references in *Under Two Flags* to "all the green wealth and Norman beauty of [the] Royallieu" (119) estate, which throughout the text symbolises the English landscape—the "green spring-tide leafage of English woodlands" (527)—that Cecil loses and recovers.<sup>13</sup>

Although the trajectory outlined above imagines a characteristically English aristocracy, for the most part Englishness in *Under Two Flags* is middle class, and hence incompatible with nobility (this is in keeping with the common belief in the mid-nineteenth century that the English aristocracy identified more with foreign aristocrats than the lower classes of their own country). The impulse to portray Cecil as noble rather than middle class and English produces a contradictory desire to make those middle class

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until the late nineteenth century that scientific discourse about race would thoroughly penetrate the minds of the general public.

<sup>12</sup> See Stephanie L. Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood*, pp155-161.

<sup>13</sup> A similar fantasy of aristocratic racial purity is evident in Ouida's description of the Arab Sheikh, Ilderim, who is "a superb specimen of his race, without the lean, withered, rapacious, vulture look, which often mars it" (210). Significantly, his features are described in terms of nobility: he is "the noblest type of the eagle-eyed, aquiline desert beauty" (210) and his face has "a grand and kingly majesty" (211).

qualities that constitute his Englishness—including those that the aristocracy has been seen to be defined *against*—invoke also his nobility. Thus when describing how Picpon’s “malignity never succeed[s] in breaking the ‘aristocrat’s’ silence and contemptuous forbearance from all reprisal” (286) the narrator seems to suggest that Cecil’s self-control is attributable to his class rather than his Englishness. Similarly, Cecil’s fairness may suggest middle class self-control, but it also has the potential, like Venetia’s “amber” hair and blue eyes, to denote his nobility. Cigarette notices not just Cecil’s fair skin and white hands, but his “delicate” “features” and “very soft” “eyes,” concluding that he is “noble, whatever he is” (181).

The blurring of the boundaries between nobility and middle class Englishness is partly facilitated by the novel’s use of the figure of the gentleman. In this respect the novel may be seen as illustrating and contributing to that process of redefining the concept of gentlemanliness that was so important in the 1860s.<sup>14</sup> Certain gentlemanly qualities, derived from aristocratic models of behaviour, simultaneously signal Cecil’s nobility. In the first part of the novel, his honour is a shared aristocratic code that distinguishes him and the Seraph from the middle class ethics of the Jew Baroni. Cecil’s word is enough to convince the Seraph of his innocence, but it is insufficient in the eyes of the wider world, as Baroni points out:

“We men of business, sir, are—perhaps inconveniently for gentlemen—given to a preference in favour of something more substantial. Your word, doubtless, is your bond among your acquaintance .... but all the same I must persist—how can you disprove this charge?” (127)

In another episode from the first part of the novel, Cecil refuses Berkeley’s request that he borrow money from the Seraph on the grounds that “it would be the shame of a gentleman” (82), and is “troubled,” “surprised” and “oppressed” by his brother’s lack of

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Jennifer Phegley’s ‘Clearing Away “The Briars and Brambles”: The Education and Professionalization of the *Cornhill Magazine*’s Women Readers, 1860-65’ and Ina Ferris’s ‘Thackeray and the ideology of the Gentleman.’



“that delicate, intangible, indescribable sensitive-nerve which men call Honour” (82). Significantly, Berkeley’s challenge to Cecil’s honour rouses in him “the haughty and untameable temper of the Royallieu blood” (82). When Venetia later guesses his identity, he is incapable of denying it, for “not even for his brother’s sake, or for sake of his pledged word, could he have lied to *her*” (433): that is, there is a sense in which it would be especially bad to lie to this superior, aristocratic woman. Cecil’s courteous manners also denote his nobility. His bow, the narrator notes, “had used to be noted in throne-rooms for its perfection of grace” (182). There is thus a tension in the novel between Cecil’s need to leave the effeminate aristocratic world before he can become a true gentleman, and concomitantly a true Englishman, and its insistence that he has already attained that status by virtue of his nobility. As Rake announces on the very first page:

“he’s a true gentleman, Mr Cecil; never grudge a guinea, or a fiver to you; never out of temper neither; always a kind word for you if you want; thoro’-bred every inch of him; see him bring down a rocketeer, or lift his horse over the Broad Water! He’s a gentleman—not like your snobs that have nothing sound about ‘em but their cash, and swept out their shops before they bought their fine feathers! ... ” (3)

The novel’s impulse to render those characteristics that denote Cecil’s middle class Englishness symptomatic of his nobility is also facilitated by the working classes’ relationship with the aristocracy. The idea that the lower classes were less civilised than the upper classes, as famously illustrated by Dickens’s description of Jo in *Bleak House* (1853), was familiar:

A band of music comes, and plays. Jo listens to it. So does a dog—a drover’s dog, waiting for his master outside a butcher’s shop .... A thoroughly vagabond dog, accustomed to low company and public-houses; a terrific dog to sheep; ready at a whistle to scamper over their backs, and tear out mouthfuls of their wool; but an educated, improved, developed dog, who has been taught his duties and knows

how to discharge them. He and Jo listen to the music, probably with much the same amount of animal satisfaction; likewise, as to awakened association, aspiration or regret, melancholy or joyful reference to things beyond the senses, they are probably upon a par. But, otherwise, how far above the human listener is the brute!

Turn that dog's descendants wild, like Jo, and in a very few years they will so degenerate that they will lose even their bark—but not their bite. (237-8)

Working class savagery, in contrast to the civility of the aristocracy, is hinted at throughout the novel. When Cigarette's "untutored, half-barbaric, impulsive young heart" is contrasted to "the high-bred, cultured, world-wise mind of Venetia Corona" (456), the novel offers an alternative interpretation of her savage tendencies as symptomatic of her social class rather than her nationality while simultaneously exalting aristocratic superiority. Likewise, when Cecil's influence among the soldiers is described as civilising, or "humaniz[ing]" (248), there is a telling emphasis on his nobility:

The most savage and obscene brute in the ranks with him caught something gentler and better from the 'aristocrat' .... The coarsest ruffian felt ashamed to make an utter beast of himself before the calm eyes of the patrician. (248-9)

It is Rake, however, who performs both English and working class identities, who most readily exposes the privileged nature of Cecil's English characteristics. (As I have already detailed, their relationship is explicitly figured in terms of their class difference.) Although Rake is never aligned with French brutality—one assumes that, out of loyalty to his master, he treats the Arabs with respect, as his inclusion in the visit to the Arab camp suggests—he is still characterised by a certain lack of sophistication, and concomitant lack of self-restraint, that is principally conveyed by his alignment with dogs. He artlessly expresses his emotions like a dog, looking up at Cecil in one episode with eyes as "wistfu[l]" and eager as a dog's when he prays to be let out of kennel to follow the gun" and a voice that is "husky and agitated with a strong excitement" (147).

Likewise, when Cecil offers him the ‘favour’ of riding with him on an errand to almost certain death, his response is spaniel-like, his “warm blood ... dancing” and his

blue eyes ... alive like fire with delight. That he had been absent on a far-away foraging raid on the day of Zarâila had been nothing short of agony to Rake, and the choice made of him for this duty was to him a gift of paradise .... to be beside Cecil was the greatest happiness life held for him. (397)

Connoting faithful servitude, simplicity and the need for control, the dog metaphor is an effective way of symbolising the paternalistic relationship. The dog metaphor actually denotes the version of Englishness accessible to a working class man in the novel. Rake is a “British bull-dog” (243) who, like the bulk of English working class soldiers (221), will “set his teeth at the leash and the lash” and “hold on like grim death in a fight, and live game to the last, if well handled” (243) (the need for working class control implicit in this is obvious).

Rake’s relationship to English taciturnity is more complex. Like his respect for the Arabs, which has its roots in a desire to serve his master—that is, to preserve class differences—his concern for Cecil enables him to appropriate English taciturnity. It is not just Cecil but also Rake who “will never tell” who Cecil is because “thou wilt never make an Englishman speak when he is bent to be silent” (178). In general, though, Rake is incorrigibly voluble, responding to Cecil’s plea for him to adopt silence with the words

“You might as well tell a Newfoundland not to love a splash as me not to love a chatter. I’d cut my tongue out sooner than say never a word that you don’t wish—but say *somethin’* I must, or die for it.” (219)

When the relationship between Rake and Cecil is in question, taciturnity is a quality that, for the most part, suggests nobility.

As much as the text strains to reconcile Cecil's self-disciplined, middle class, masculine Englishness with his nobility, to an extent the two identities simply refuse to align. This testifies in turn to that fundamental part of middle class identity that, insofar as it is grounded in the middle class desire to define themselves against the aristocracy, renders the two classes incompatible. Cecil has a wildness that does not align at all with the dominant middle class Englishness, a different, contradictory manifestation of that quality that we have seen Ouida's middle class impulse earlier transform into savagery. The scene describing Cecil's escape from Baroni is illustrative. As explained, on one level it represents the initiation into the masculine physicality that helps him develop from an effeminate aristocrat into a self-controlled middle class Englishman, but it can also be interpreted as an invocation of his aristocratic wildness:

In an instant, all the wild blood of his race, all the pride of his breeding, all the honour of his service, flashed into fire and leapt into action .... all he thought, all he felt, all he knew, were the lion impulses, the knightly instincts, the resolute choice to lose life rather than to lose freedom, of a soldier and a gentleman. (137)

It is notable that Cecil's "wildness" is associated with aristocratic languor, which especially signals resistance to the self-restraint of middle class Englishness:

the old carelessness, mutability, and indolent philosophies were with him still .... Though much of gravity and of thoughtfulness had stolen on him, much of insouciance remained; and there were times when there was not a more reckless or a more nonchalant *lion* in all the battalions than 'Bel-à-faire-peur.' Under his gentleness there was 'wild blood' in him still .... (248)

For all his reformation in Algeria, this element of aristocratic languor persists in Cecil's character. He has "a certain mingling of insouciance and melancholy" (219) and is "too calmly listless" (234) for the other soldiers. In one episode, Châteauroy accuses him of obeying "with such a d—d languid *grand seigneur* glance as he listens that one would think he commanded the regiment" (187). Cigarette's assessment of the aristocratic

character is accurate in this instance: “[t]heir touch is so gentle, and their speech is so soft, and they have no slang of the camp, and yet they are such *diablotins* to fight and eat steel, and die laughing all so quiet and nonchalant” (188).

Even more significantly, part of Cecil’s resistance to middle class Englishness is figured through a resistance to middle class masculinity: for all that Ouida is, in contrast to Brontë, complicit with masculine power so long as she invokes the dominant middle class discourse of Englishness, resistance to middle class gender ideology in *Under Two Flags* is possible *outside* it. When Châteauroy calls Cecil “a soldier who is too effeminate an idler to do anything except attitudinize in interesting situations to awaken sympathy” (268), he is being somewhat unfair, but his awareness of the element of femininity that persists in Cecil’s character in the second part of the novel is not misplaced. As Tata announces, Cecil has “a woman’s face” with “naturally very fair” skin, “delicate” features and “very soft” eyes that the “sun of Algiers, and the labours that fall to a private of Chasseurs” (181) have pointedly failed to roughen. The element of femininity that persists in Cecil’s character in the second part of the novel is, tellingly, linked to his nobility. In this passage, the delicacy of his features indicates his social class:

“*Ma cantche!* white hands and a brunette’s face are fine things for a soldier. He kills women, he kills women with his lady’s grace! ....” (200)

Cecil shares his femininity with other nobles. He has “[*m*]ain de femme, mais main de fer ... comme une Marquise du Faubourg” (235), and the soldier “Marquise” [gained] his name from the fact that “he was so womanish white in his skin and so dainty in all his ways,” “[j]ust like [Cecil]!” (255) [again suggesting a transnational quality]. Of course, as the above quotation illustrates, Cecil’s femininity is balanced by his masculine physicality, but it does suggest resistance to the masculine, middle class ideology that dominated discourse of Englishness.

It is Cigarette, however, who is the site of Ouida’s most profound resistance to the gender ideology implicit in middle class Englishness. Like M. Paul, her foreignness facilitates

her utilisation in the service of the novel's reformation of English gender roles. In addition to the foreignness conferred by her Frenchness, however, Cigarette is rendered exotic with Oriental characteristics. I have already discussed her African colouring, but she is also, as Gilbert points out, "explicitly connected with the Oriental woman" ('New Woman' 175), dancing for the soldiers "with the wild grace of an Almeh, of a Bayadère, of a Nautch girl" (193).<sup>15</sup> A sense of exoticness is further suggested by the narrator's assertion that "[t]he famous Cachucha, that made the reverend Cardinals of Spain fling off their pontifical vestments, and surrender themselves to the witchery of the castanets and the gleam of the white twinkling feet, was never more irresistible, more enchanting, more full of wild, soft, bizarre, delicious grace" (193). With her "dark hair" and "frenzied erotic gestures," Cigarette clearly embodies John Greenfield's idea of the "stereotype of the exotic woman in her guise as seductive *femme fatale*" (21).

Edward Said's *Orientalism* shows how exoticism traps Oriental subjects inside the Western gaze, but there is also an extent to which it can, even more than the European foreignness of M. Paul, liberate characters from English cultural norms. As the above description suggests, Cigarette possess an overt sexuality that is at odds with the middle class ideal of passionless femininity. In a much more audacious manner than Lucy, she violates further the dominant middle class ideology of femininity by enacting a fantasy of a woman performing a masculine part. With her hair "cut short like a boy's" (182), she exults "with an intense pride [in] all her fiery liberty from every feminine trammel, [and] all her complete immunity from every scruple and fastidiousness of her sex" (454). A "soldier" who has "seen ... war in earnest" (256), she will "shoot a man, if need be, with all the nonchalance in the world" (179), "swear ... like a Zouave ... fire galloping ... toss off her brandy or her vermouth like a trooper" and "on occasion clench her little brown hand and deal a blow that the recipient would not covet twice" (175). In "ten minutes' pistol-shooting" she "beat[s] hollow a young dandy of the Guides who ha[s] come to look

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<sup>15</sup> According to Gilbert, "British readers were familiar with the figure of the figure of the Nautch girl as the emblem of Indian moral decay and its infectiousness; British men, it was thought, were vulnerable to the appeal of the Nautch girls who encouraged them to 'go native'" ('New Woman' 175).

at Algiers for a week, and ma[kes] even points with one of the first shots of the ‘*Cavalerie à pied*’” (185).

It is Cigarette’s idealistic French nationalism that provides her with the vehicle to transgress English gender mores in this way. Ouida may criticise the philosophy informing her republicanism, but there is a heroic side to her political spirit that betrays authorial approval of her transgression of middle class gender ideology. Cigarette has, the narrator says, not only the “rash prejudices” but “all the instinctive truths ... of an uncompromising *Rouge*” (460):

In the fair, slight, girlish body of the child-soldier there lived a courage as daring as Danton’s, a patriotism as pure as Vergniaud’s, a soul as aspiring as Napoléon’s. Untaught, untutored, uninspired by poet’s words or patriot’s bidding, spontaneous as the rising and the blossoming of some wind-sown, sun-fed flower, there was, in this child of the battle and the razzia, the spirit of genius, the desire to live and to die greatly. (447)

Cigarette’s heroic qualities are fully realised in the novel when she first wins the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and then saves Cecil from execution by hurling her body in front of his to receive the bullets.

Like Brontë, Ouida’s protest against middle class gender ideology is moderated by her inability wholly to resist it. Although the reader is told that Cigarette “had had a thousand lovers” (179), she is never depicted with any of them. Instead, her love is rendered appropriately pure by the narrator’s assertion that, until Cecil, “she had never loved anything, except the roll of the *pas de charge*, and the sight of her own arch defiant face” (179). Cigarette is also characterised by maternal qualities, lovingly and selflessly tending the wounded soldiers to whom she “never br[ings] anything except sunshine” (302):

there were tales told in the barrack-yards and under canvas of .... how softly she would touch the wounded; of how deftly she would cure them. Of how carelessly she would dash through under a raking fire, to take a draught of water to a dying man. Of how she had sat by an old Grenadier's death-couch, to sing to him, refusing to stir, though it was a fête at Châlons, and she loved fêtes as only a French girl can .... Her own sex would have seen no good in her; but her comrades-at-arms could, and did. Of a surety, she missed virtues that some women prize; but, not less of a surety, had she caught some that they miss. (180-1)

Just as Brontë is compelled to minimise Lucy's academic aspirations, Cigarette's violation of middle class gender ideology is constrained by the conservatism of the English audience for whom the novel was written. Outwardly, this induces Ouida to censure her behaviour. "She [is] bewitching now," the narrator warns, "[b]ut when the bloom sh[all] leave her brown cheeks, and the laughter die out of her lightning glance, the womanhood she ha[s] defied w[ill] ... avenge itself, and be hideous in the sight of the men who now lov[e] the tinkling of those little spurred feet" (259). In spite of herself, the realisation that "her older years w[ill] be very dark, very terrible" (454) haunts Cigarette. But English conservatism is not accepted uncritically, as the enthusiasm for Cigarette's heroism outlined above betrays. Cigarette herself damningly voices distrust of conservative middle class Englishness:

"I love France—yes .... She is so brave, too, and so fair, and so *riante*, and so gay. Not like your Albion ... who is a great *gobemouche* stuffed full of cotton, steaming with fog, clutching gold with one hand and the Bible with the other, that she may swell her money-bags, and seem a saint all the same; never laughing, never learning, always growling, always shuffling .... " (387-8)

As the narrator points out, there is truth in her judgement, for "Cigarette, though she kn[ows] not her A, B, C, D, and [cannot] writ[e] her name to save her life, ha[s] a certain



bright intelligence of her own that ca[tches] up political tidings, and grasp[s] at public subjects with a skill education alone will not bestow” (388).

Ironically, given his own femininity, Cecil is the novel’s main voice of English conservatism. He alone is unimpressed by Cigarette, deeming her “too pretty to be unsexed by such a life” (203) and imagining her “in a few years’ time” as “the yellow, battered, foul-mouthed, vulture-eyed camp-follower that premature old age w[ill] surely render the darling of the tricolour” (259). While the consequences of Cigarette’s transgression of middle class English gender boundaries may be inescapable enough to require her death at the end of the novel, Cecil’s failure to comprehend her outside those terms means he is incapable of appreciating her heroic qualities. He sees only “what beauty, grace, and genius might have been developed out of the untamed, untutored, inconsequent, but glorious nature of the child-warrior” if “the accidents of her life had been different” (387). The blindness of such a worldview is evident when Cecil muses that “a gallant boy is spoilt in that little Amazon!” (258), to which the narrator responds, “he might have gone further, and said that a hero was lost” (260). One is left with the words of the “artist-trooper” Léon Ramon (Gilbert notes how “Ouida’s artists are always prescient” (‘New Woman’ 176)):

“Ah, *tais-toi!* .... Spare me the old world-worn, threadbare formulas. Because the flax and the colza blossom for use [sic], and the garden-flowers grow trained and pruned, must there be no bud that opens for mere love of the sun, and swings free in the wind in its fearless fair fashion? Believe me, dear Victor, it is the lives which follow no previous rule that do the most good and give the most harvest.” (309)

Cecil’s thoughts immediately afterwards seem to undermine Ramon’s speech, but, subversively, it is the Frenchman’s predictions that are fulfilled—Cigarette has the heroic death for which she longs, not the grim future that Cecil sees for her. At one moment, the narrator even says that Cecil does her “that injustice which the best amongst us are apt to do to those whom we do not feel interest enough in to study with that closeness which

can alone give comprehension of the intricate and complex rebus ... of human nature” (314). Furthermore, when she sacrifices her life for him, Cecil finally realises her true worth:

The full strength and nobility of this devotion he had disbelieved in and neglected rushed on him as he met her eyes; for the first time he saw her as she was, for the first time he saw all of which the splendid heroism of this untrained nature would have been capable under a different fate. And it struck him suddenly, heavily, as with a blow; it filled him with a passion of remorse. (525)

Tellingly, the last words of the novel are dedicated to Cigarette. The narrator pictures her grave, on which

there [is] carved in the white stone one name that sp[eaks] to every heart within the Army she had loved, one name on which the Arab sun stream[s] as with a martyr’s glory:

#### CIGARETTE

ENFANT DE L’ARMÉE, SOLDAT DE LA FRANCE. (528)

Cigarette’s adherence to middle class domesticity might reveal Ouida’s own complicity in this ideology, but it also exposes its limitations. The narrow conception of womanhood that compels Cecil to deem her “unsexed” and reject her as a potential love interest renders him overwhelmingly blind to those elements of femininity that *do* conform to the dominant ideology. Ouida stresses that it is Cecil alone who is oblivious to her; his lack of attention is “an insult” that Cigarette “ha[s] never been subjected to, from the first day when she had danced for sweetmeats on the top of a great drum when she was three years old” (202). Cigarette’s femininity is repeatedly emphasised throughout the novel: she is “thoroughly woman-like in her passions and her instincts, though she so fiercely contemn[s] womanhood” (363), and her “weathercock heart ... veer[s] round, with her

sex's common custom, to the side that [is] the weakest" (188). The narrator even says "she ha[s] the delicious fragrance of youth, and ha[s] not left a certain feminine grace behind her, though she w[ears] a vivandière's uniform, and ha[s] been born in a barrack, and mean[s] to die in a battle; it [is] the blending of the two that ma[kes] her piquante" (175-6).

The text's subversion of its conformity to middle class domestic ideology is extended in the character of Venetia. Outwardly, it pretends to express a proper English disapproval of Cigarette's gender transgression by labelling her as unsexed and positioning Venetia as the acceptable feminine alternative:

Now, for the first time, the little Friend of the Flag looked at all the nameless graces of rank ... with a sudden perception, quick as thought, bitter as gall, wounding, and swift, and poignant, of what this womanhood, that he had said she herself had lost, might be in its highest and purest shape.

"Unsexed—he said I was unsexed," she mused, while her teeth clenched on the ruby fulness of her lips, and her heart swelled, half with impotent rage, half with unconfessed pain. (262-3)

Although obviously presented as superior to Cigarette, Venetia is somewhat equivocal as a model of middle class English femininity. Cecil may reject Cigarette for failing to conform to the dominant ideology of femininity, but his attraction for Venetia is, as I have already noted, based exclusively on her nobility. Furthermore, while Venetia may not transgress gender boundaries to the same extent as Cigarette, she is also not conventionally feminine. She has little warmth and few domestic qualities. She has "seen much of the world" (332) and, despite Cecil's concerns about the suitability of such endeavours for a woman, "travels to see the country and the war" (415) because "Miladi does not know what fear is" (416). Similarly, when Cigarette confronts her with her "pistol half out of her belt" (464), Venetia "disarm[s]" her with her "courage" (464), "put[ting] her hand out and clasp[ing] the barrel of the weapon ... with calm, contemptuous rebuke in which something of infinite pity [is] mingled" (464).

Significantly, Venetia is of “an heroic race; she ha[s] heroic blood in her” (429) and her “superb nature” is characterised by “courageous and ... chivalrous instincts” (438). The “heroic blood” that gives her her noble nature is, of course, the “the blood of King Arthur” (295) that denotes her noble Englishness. Instead of offering a model of middle class, domestic Englishness, then, the novel tricks the reader by moving back to a construction of aristocratic Englishness that simultaneously affirms feminine heroism. This critique of Englishness is weakened by the fact that, in general, Venetia’s nationality, as distinct from her social class, is not strongly emphasised. (The names by which she is known in Algeria, Mme. La Princesse Corona d’Amägué and Venetia, do not sound English at all, but a mixture of French, Spanish and Italian.) Nonetheless, *Under Two Flags* ultimately offers, albeit in a limited way, that which *Villette* is unable to conceptualise: a female Englishness constructed outside the boundaries of middle class ideology.

Nobility in *Under Two Flags*, like foreignness, thus offers the possibility of resistance to the middle class masculine social power accommodated within the dominant construction of Englishness. However, as I have endeavoured to show, this resistance is never stable, but subject throughout to a competing middle class trajectory of Englishness that affirms middle class, masculine social power. Like Brontë, Ouida is unconsciously and inescapably driven by the dominant middle class discourse of her society, even as she resists it.

## CONCLUSION

During the mid-nineteenth century, the struggle for social power was dominated by the interests of middle class men, and complicated by the desire simultaneously to be admitted into the aristocracy. One site where this struggle took place was mid-Victorian discourse about Englishness. The dominant mid-Victorian ideology of Englishness principally relied upon middle class gender ideology. Englishwomen were relegated to a primarily symbolic role, performing the middle class ideal of universal domestic femininity that was crucial to the promotion of middle class, masculine social power. Englishness became an implicitly masculine, middle class quality, relying upon the very binaries that constructed gender and middleclass identity. At the same time, however, the dominant discourse of Englishness reflected the ambivalence of the middle class relationship towards the aristocracy.

The dominant discourse was never stable or homogeneous. While, as Gramsci argues, those outside the dominant discourse often consent to the strictures that exclude them from social power, there is always the potential for resistance and renegotiation. As figures outside the dominant discourse, yet ambivalently placed inside it, middle class women writers were peculiarly situated both to conform to and resist the dominant discourse about Englishness. These tensions are productively reflected in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and Ouida's *Under Two Flags*, the foreign settings of which notably provide fruitful ground for resistance to the dominant discourse.

While the construction of Englishness in *Villette* is almost always complicit with middle class social power, the novel radically renegotiates the gender roles within that discourse. Authorised by popular English prejudice about Protestantism and Catholicism, Lucy constructs an English identity that appropriates aspects of middle class masculine identity and enables her to have the national identity denied women by the dominant discourse. The culmination of the construction of her identity is symbolised by her school, simultaneously a home and the site of her economic success. As Lucy's need for a home suggests, Brontë is still constrained by dominant middle class ideas about femininity,

with Lucy notably desiring the love of a man whom she can tend in a domestic setting. Her English identity consists rather of a combination of masculine and feminine qualities, a blurring of gender roles that also exists in M. Paul, who functions as an honorary Englishman. Lucy's inability to relinquish crucial elements of middle class femininity means that M. Paul poses a threat to her independence that must be resolved with the somewhat unsatisfactory solution of having him killed at sea. Brontë also betrays awareness that Lucy's English identity is only possible in the foreign setting: not only is it impossible in England, but it dissolves when she is confronted with other English people in *Villette*. The fact that M. Paul must be a foreigner also suggests pessimism about the possibility of Englishmen sharing social power.

*Under Two Flags* is even more fraught with a contradictory mix of resistance to and complicity with the dominant social power. *Villette* may never seriously challenge middle class social dominance, but *Under Two Flags* is infused with conflict between the desire to valorise aristocratic superiority and Ouida's inability to resist the dominant middle class discourse, as well as simultaneous resistance to and complicity with masculine social power. Although Ouida does introduce some elements of Englishness that promote aristocratic social power, the conception of English national identity upon which the novel relies is for the most part that which advanced the middle classes. Ouida's conflicting desire to promote the aristocracy induces her simultaneously to use those characteristics that construct Cecil's middle class Englishness to construct his nobility. Furthermore, resistance to the qualities themselves that constitute the dominant middle class ideology of Englishness is suggested by the way in which certain elements of Cecil's aristocratic character are ultimately irreconcilable with it. This resistance notably provides the source for resistance to the gender ideology contained within the middle class discourse about Englishness that the novel simultaneously supports. There is further resistance to the dominant middle class gender ideology in the character of Cigarette, whose foreignness offers a site for transgressive English femininity. Although the novel pretends, unconvincingly, to condemn such behaviour, its feigned use of Venetia as an alternative model of middle class English femininity subversively undercuts middle class gender ideology and offers the possibility of an English identity outside its constraints.

Like Brontë, though, Ouida is incapable of relinquishing middle class gender ideology, with Cigarette conforming to the dominant ideology of middle class English femininity even as she rejects it. As with *Villette*, then, *Under Two Flags* offers insight into the play of social power in mid-Victorian England in discourse about Englishness, both testifying to the hegemonic nature of the dominant discourse and the potential for its power to be subverted or resisted.

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